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naught. The South was virtually absent. No great speeches were made, and only one or two good ones, and no member showed himself competent to grapple with either of the two serious questions that arose. Awkward pauses in the business occurred, and numerous faults in point of taste were committed. Enthusiasm for men or for principles at no time passed beyond control. But no Republican convention, composed of however capable members, and conducted with however great skill and dignity, could have nominated men stronger with the party than Ulysses S. Grant and Schuyler Colfax, or less likely to injure its prospects of success by writing unwise letters as Henry Clay did, or by making foolish speeches as Winfield Scott did. Nor could any convention have framed a more satisfactory declaration of the principles which should govern the Administration to be inaugurated on the 4th of March next.

ADAMS SHERMAN HILL.

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ART. IX.—1. *The Dramatick Works of JOHN DRYDEN, ESQ.*

In six volumes. London: Printed for Jacob Tonson, in the Strand. MDCCXXXV. 18mo.

2. *The Critical and Miscellaneous Prose-Works of JOHN DRYDEN, now first collected. With Notes and Illustrations. An Account of the Life and Writings of the Author, grounded on Original and Authentick Documents; and a Collection of his Letters, the greatest Part of which has never before been published.* By EDMUND MALONE, ESQ. London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, in the Strand. 4 vols. 8vo.

3. *The Poetical Works of JOHN DRYDEN.* (Edited by MITFORD.) London: W. Pickering. 1832. 5 vols. 18mo.

BENVENUTO CELLINI tells us that when, in his boyhood, he saw a salamander come out of the fire, his grandfather forthwith gave him a sound beating, that he might the better remember so unique a prodigy. Though perhaps in this case the rod had another application than the autobiographer

chooses to disclose, and was intended to fix in the pupil's mind a lesson of veracity rather than of science, the testimony to its mnemonic virtue remains. Nay, so universally was it once believed that the senses, and through them faculties of observation and retention, were quickened by an irritation of the cuticle, that in France it was customary to whip the children annually at the boundaries of the parish, lest the true place of them might ever be lost through neglect of so inexpensive a mordant for the *mémory*. From this practice the older school of critics would seem to have taken a hint for keeping fixed the limits of good taste, and what was somewhat vaguely called *classical* English. To mark these limits in poetry, they set up as *Hermæ* the images they had made to them of Dryden, of Pope, and later of Goldsmith. Here they solemnly castigated every new aspirant in verse, who in turn performed the same function for the next generation, thus helping to keep always sacred and immovable the *ne plus ultra* alike of inspiration and the vocabulary. Though no two natures were ever much more unlike than those of Dryden and Pope, and again of Pope and Goldsmith, and no two styles, except in such externals as could be easily caught and copied, yet it was the fashion, down even to the last generation, to advise young writers to form themselves, as it was called, on these excellent models. Wordsworth himself began in this school; and though there were glimpses, here and there, of a direct study of nature, yet most of the epithets in his earlier pieces were of the traditional kind so fatal to the poetry of the last century; and he indulged in that alphabetic personification which enlivens all such words as Hunger, Solitude, Freedom, by the easy magic of an initial capital.

~      "Where the green apple shrivels on the spray,  
And pines the unripened pear in summer's kindest ray,  
Even here Content has fixed her smiling reign  
With Independence, child of high Disdain.  
Exulting 'mid the winter of the skies,  
Shy as the jealous chamois, Freedom flies,  
And often grasps her sword, and often eyes."

Here we have every characteristic of the artificial method, even to the triplet, which Swift hated so heartily as "a vicious way of rhyming wherewith Mr. Dryden abounded, imitated by all the

bad versifiers of Charles the Second's reign." Wordsworth became, indeed, very early the leader of reform; but, like Wesley, he endeavored a reform within the Establishment. Purifying the substance, he retained the outward forms, with a feeling rather than conviction that, in poetry, substance and form are but manifestations of the same inward life, the one fused into the other in the vivid heat of their common expression. Wordsworth could never wholly shake off the influence of the century into which he was born. He began by proposing a reform of the ritual, but it went no further than an attempt to get rid of the words of Latin origin where the meaning was as well or better given in derivatives of the Saxon. He would have stricken out the "assemble" and left the "meet together." Like Wesley, he might be compelled by necessity to a breach of the canon; but, like him, he was never a willing schismatic, and his singing robes were the full and flowing canonicals of the church by law established. Inspiration makes short work with the usage of the best authors and ready-made elegances of diction; but where Wordsworth is not possessed by his demon, as Molière said of Corneille, he equals Thomson in verbiage, out-Miltons Milton in artifice of style, and Latinizes his diction beyond Dryden. The fact was, that he took up his early opinions on instinct, and insensibly modified them as he studied the masters of what may be called the Middle Period of English verse.\* As a young man, he disparaged Virgil ("we talked a great deal of nonsense in those days," he said when taken to task for it later in life); at fifty-nine he translated three books of the *Æneid*, in emulation of Dryden, though falling far short of him in everything but closeness, as he seems, after a few years, to have been convinced. Keats was the first resolute and wilful heretic, the true founder of the modern school, which admits no *cis-Elizabethan* authority save Milton, whose English was formed upon those earlier models. Keats denounced the authors of that style which came in toward the close of the seventeenth century, and reigned absolute through the whole of the eighteenth, as

"a schism,

Nurtured by foppery and barbarism,

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\* His "Character of a Happy Warrior" (1806), one of his noblest poems, has a dash of Dryden in it.

. . . . . who went about  
 Holding a poor decrepit standard out,  
 Marked with most flimsy mottoes, and in large  
 The name of one Boileau !”

But Keats had never studied the writers of whom he speaks so contemptuously, though he might have profited by so doing. Boileau would at least have taught him that *flimsy* would have been an apter epithet for the *standard* than for the mottoes upon it. Dryden was the author of this schism against which Keats so vehemently asserts the claim of the orthodox teaching it had displaced. He was far more just to Boileau, of whom Keats had probably never read a word. “If I would only cross the seas,” he says, “I might find in France a living Horace and a Juvenal in the person of the admirable Boileau, whose numbers are excellent, whose expressions are noble, whose thoughts are just, whose language is pure, whose satire is pointed, and whose sense is just. What he borrows from the ancients he repays with usury of his own, in coin as good and almost as universally valuable.” \*

Dryden has now been in his grave nearly a hundred and seventy years ; in the second class of English poets perhaps no one stands, on the whole, so high as he ; during his lifetime, in spite of jealousy, detraction, unpopular politics, and a suspicious change of faith, his pre-eminence was conceded ; he was the earliest complete type of the purely literary man, in the modern sense ; there is a singular unanimity in allowing him a certain claim to *greatness* which would be denied to men as famous and more read, — to Pope or Swift, for example ; he is supposed, in some way or other, to have reformed English poetry. It is now about half a century since the only uniform edition of his works was edited by Scott. No library is complete without him, no name is more familiar than his, and yet it may be suspected that few writers are more thoroughly buried in that great cemetery of the “British Poets.” If contemporary reputation be often deceitful, posthumous fame may be generally trusted, for it is a verdict made up of the suffrages of the select men in succeeding generations. This verdict has

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\* On the Origin and Progress of Satire. See Johnson’s counter opinion in his Life of Dryden.

been as good as unanimous in favor of Dryden. It is, perhaps, worth while to take a fresh observation of him, to consider him neither as warning nor example, but to endeavor to make out what it is that has given so lofty and firm a position to one of the most unequal, inconsistent, and faulty writers that ever lived. He is a curious example of what we often remark of the living, but rarely of the dead, — that they get credit for what they might be quite as much as for what they are, and posterity has applied to him one of his own rules of criticism, judging him by the best rather than the average of his achievement, — a thing posterity is seldom wont to do. On the losing side in politics, it is true of his polemical writings as of Burke's, — whom, in many respects, and especially in that supreme quality of a reasoner, that his mind gathers not only heat, but clearness and expansion, by its own motion, — that they have won his battle for him in the judgment of after times.

To us, looking back at him, he gradually becomes a singularly interesting and even picturesque figure. He is, in more senses than one, in language, in turn of thought, in style of mind, in the direction of his activity, the first of the moderns. He is the first literary man who was also a man of the world, as we understand the term. He succeeded Ben Jonson as the acknowledged dictator of wit and criticism, as Dr. Johnson, after nearly the same interval, succeeded him. All ages are, in some sense, ages of transition ; but in some the transition is more marked, more rapid ; and it is, perhaps, an ill fortune for a man of letters to arrive at maturity during such a period, still more to represent in himself the change that is going on, and to be an efficient cause in bringing it about. Unless, like Goethe, he is of a singularly unctemporaneous nature, capable of being *tutta in se romita*, and running parallel with his time rather than being sucked into its current, he will be thwarted of that harmonious development of native force which has so much to do with its steady and successful application. Dryden suffered, no doubt, in this way. Though in creed he seems to have drifted backward in an eddy of the general current ; yet of the intellectual movement of the time, so far certainly as literature shared in it, he could say, with Æneas, not only that he saw, but that himself was a great part of it. That

movement was, on the whole, a downward one, from faith to scepticism, from enthusiasm to cynicism, from the imagination to the understanding. It was in a direction altogether away from those springs of imagination and faith at which they of the last age had slaked the thirst or renewed the vigor of their souls. Dryden himself recognized that indefinable and gregarious influence which we call now-a-days the Spirit of the Age, when he said that "every Age has a kind of universal Genius." \* He had also a just notion of that in which he lived; for he remarks, incidentally, that "all knowing ages are naturally sceptic and not at all bigoted, which, if I am not much deceived, is the proper character of our own." † It may be conceived that he was even painfully half aware of having fallen upon a time incapable, not merely of a great poet, but perhaps of any poet at all; for nothing is so sensitive to the chill of a sceptical atmosphere as that enthusiasm which, if it is not genius, is at least the beautiful illusion that saves it from the baffling quibbles of self-consciousness. Thrice unhappy he who, born to see things as they might be, is schooled by circumstances to see them as people say they are,—to read God in a prose translation. Such was Dryden's lot, and such, for a good part of his days, it was by his own choice. He who was of a stature to snatch the torch of life that flashes from lifted hand to hand along the generations, over the heads of inferior men, chose rather to be a link-boy to the stews.

As a writer for the stage, he deliberately adopted and repeatedly reaffirmed the maxim that

"He who lives to please, must please to live."

Without earnest convictions, no great or sound literature is conceivable. But if Dryden mostly wanted that inspiration which comes of belief in, and devotion to, something nobler and more abiding than the present moment and its petulant need, he had, at least, the next best thing to that,—a thorough faith in himself. He was, moreover, a man of singularly open soul, and of a temper self-confident enough to be candid even with himself. His mind was growing to the last, his judgment widening and deepening, his artistic sense refining itself more and more. He confessed his errors, and was not ashamed to

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\* Essay on Dramatick Poesy.

† Life of Lucian.

retrace his steps in search of that better knowledge which the omniscience of superficial study had disparaged. Surely an intellect that is still pliable at seventy is a phenomenon as interesting as it is rare. But at whatever period of his life we look at Dryden, and whatever, for the moment, may have been his poetic creed, there was something in the nature of the man that would not be wholly subdued to what it worked in. There are continual glimpses of something in him greater than he, hints of possibilities finer than anything he has done. You feel that the whole of him was better than any random specimens, though of his best, seem to prove. *Incessu palet*, he has by times the large stride of the elder race, though it sinks too often into the slouch of a man who has seen better days. His grand air may, in part, spring from a habit of easy superiority to his competitors; but must also, in part, be ascribed to an innate dignity of character. That this pre-eminence should have been so generally admitted, during his life, can only be explained by a bottom of good sense, kindness, and sound judgment, whose solid worth could afford that many a flurry of vanity, petulance, and even error should flit across the surface and be forgotten. Whatever else Dryden may have been, the last and abiding impression of him is, that he was thoroughly manly; and while it may be disputed whether he was a great poet, it may be said of him, as Wordsworth said of Burke, that "he was by far the greatest man of his age, not only abounding in knowledge himself, but feeding, in various directions, his most able contemporaries."

Dryden was born in 1631. He was accordingly six years old when Johnson died, was nearly a quarter of a century younger than Milton, and may have personally known Bishop Hall, the first English satirist, who was living till 1656. On the other side, he was older than Swift by thirty-six, than Addison by forty-one, and than Pope by fifty-seven years. Dennis says that "Dryden, for the last ten years of his life, was much acquainted with Addison, and drank with him more than he ever used to do, probably so far as to hasten his end," being commonly "an extreme sober man." Pope tells us that, in his twelfth year, he "saw Dryden," perhaps at Will's, perhaps in the street, as Scott did Burns. Dryden himself



visited Milton now and then, and was intimate with Davenant, who could tell him of Fletcher and Jonson, from personal recollection. Thus he stands between the age before and that which followed him, giving a hand to each. His father was a country clergyman, of Puritan leanings, a younger son of an ancient county family. The Puritanism is thought to have come in with the poet's great-grandfather, who made in his will the somewhat singular statement that he was "assured by the Holy Ghost that he was elect of God." Dryden tells us that he had read Polybius "in English, with the pleasure of a boy, before he was ten years of age, and yet even then *had some dark notions of the prudence with which he conducted his design.*" The concluding words are very characteristic, even if Dryden, as men commonly do, interpreted his boyish turn of mind by later self-knowledge. We thus get a glimpse of him browsing—for, like Johnson, Burke, and the full as distinguished from the learned men, he was always a random reader—in his father's library, and painfully culling here and there a spray of his own proper nutriment from among the stubs and thorns of Puritan divinity. After such schooling as could be had in the country, he was sent up to Westminster School, then under the headship of the celebrated Dr. Busby. Here he made his first essays in verse, translating, among other school exercises of the same kind, the third satire of Persius. In 1650 he was entered at Trinity College, Cambridge, and remained there for seven years. The only record of his college life is a discipline imposed, in 1652, for "disobedience to the Vice-Master, and contumacy in taking his punishment, inflicted by him." Whether this punishment was corporeal, as Johnson insinuates in the similar case of Milton, we are ignorant. He certainly retained no very fond recollection of his Alma Mater, for in his "Prologue to the University of Oxford" he says:—

"Oxford to him a dearer name shall be  
Than his own mother university;  
Thebes did his green, unknowing youth engage,  
He chooses Athens in his riper age."

By the death of his father, in 1654, he came into possession of a small estate of sixty pounds a year, from which, however, a

third must be deducted, for his mother's dower, till 1676. After leaving Cambridge he became secretary to his near relative, Sir Gilbert Pickering, at that time Cromwell's chamberlain, and a member of his Upper House. In 1670 he succeeded Davenant as Poet Laureate, and Howell as Historiographer, with a yearly salary of two hundred pounds. This place he lost at the Revolution, and had the mortification to see his old enemy and butt, Shadwell, promoted to it, as the best poet the Whig party could muster. If William was obliged to read the verses of his official minstrel, Dryden was more than avenged. From 1688 to his death, twelve years later, he earned his bread manfully by his pen, without any mean complaining, and with no allusion to his fallen fortunes that is not dignified and touching. These latter years, during which he was his own man again, were probably the happiest of his life. In 1664 or 1665 he married Lady Elizabeth Howard, daughter of the Earl of Berkshire. About a hundred pounds a year were thus added to his income. The marriage is said not to have been a happy one, and perhaps it was not, for his wife was apparently a weak-minded woman; but the inference from the internal evidence of Dryden's plays, as of Shakespeare's, is very untrustworthy, ridicule of marriage having always been a common stock in trade of the comic writers.

The earliest of his verses that have come down to us were written upon the death of Lord Hastings, and are as bad as they can be,—a kind of parody on the worst of Donne. They have every fault of his manner, without a hint of the subtle and often profound thought that gives it substance and value. As the Doctor himself would have said, here is Donne out-done. The young nobleman died of the small-pox, and Dryden exclaims pathetically,—

“ Was there no milder way than the small-pox,  
The very filthiness of Pandora's box ? ”

He compares the pustules to “ rosebuds stuck i' the lily skin about,” and says that

“ Each little pimple had a tear in it  
To wail the fault its rising did commit.”

But he has not done his worst yet, by a great deal. What follows is even finer : —

"No comet need foretell his change drew on,  
 Whose corpse might seem a constellation.  
 O, had he died of old, how great a strife  
 Had been who from his death should draw their life!  
 Who should, by one rich draught, become whate'er  
 Seneca, Cato, Numa, Cæsar, were,  
 Learned, virtuous, pious, great, and have by this  
 An universal metempsychosis!  
 Must all these aged sires in one funeral  
 Expire? all die in one so young, so small?"

It is said that one of Allston's early pictures was once brought to him, after he had long forgotten it, and his opinion asked as to the wisdom of the young artist's persevering in the career he had chosen. Allston advised his quitting it forthwith as hopeless. Could the same experiment have been tried with these verses upon Dryden, can any one doubt that his counsel would have been the same? It should be remembered, however, that he was barely turned eighteen when they were written. In the next year he appears again in some commendatory verses prefixed to the sacred epigrams of his friend, John Hoddesdon. In these he speaks of the author as a

"Young eaglet, who, thy nest thus soon forsook,  
 So lofty and divine a course hast took  
 As all admire, before the down begin  
 To peep, as yet, upon thy smoother chin."

Here is almost every fault which Dryden's later nicety would have condemned. But perhaps there is no schooling so good for an author as his own youthful indiscretions. After this effort Dryden seems to have lain fallow for ten years, and then he at length reappears in thirty-seven "heroic stanzas" on the death of Cromwell. The versification is smoother, but the conceits are there again, though in a milder form. The verse is modelled after "Gondibert." A single image from nature (he was almost always happy in these) gives some hint of the maturer Dryden:—

"And wars, like mists that rise against the sun,  
 Made him but greater seem, not greater grow."

Two other verses,

"And the isle, when her protecting genius went,  
 Upon his obsequies loud sighs conferred,"

are interesting, because they show that he had been studying the early poems of Milton. He has contrived to bury under a rubbish of verbiage one of the most purely imaginative passages ever written by the great Puritan poet.

“ From haunted spring and dale,  
Edged with poplar pale,  
The parting genius is with sighing sent.”

This is the more curious because, twenty-four years afterwards, he says, in defending rhyme: “ Whatever causes he [Milton] alleges for the abolishment of rhyme, his own particular reason is plainly this, that rhyme was not his talent; he had neither the ease of doing it nor the graces of it: which is manifest in his *Juvenilia*, . . . where his rhyme is always constrained and forced, and comes hardly from him, at an age when the soul is most pliant, and the passion of love makes almost every man a rhymers, though not a poet.”\* It was this, no doubt, that heartened Dr. Johnson to say of “ Lycidas ” that “ the diction was harsh, the rhymes uncertain, and the numbers displeasing.” It is Dryden’s excuse that his characteristic excellence is to argue persuasively and powerfully, whether in verse or prose, and that he was amply endowed with the most needful quality of an advocate, — to be always strongly and wholly of his present way of thinking, whatever it might be. Next we have, in 1660, “ *Astræa Redux* ” on the “ happy restoration ” of Charles II. In this also we can forebode little of the full-grown Dryden but his defects. We see his tendency to exaggeration, and to confound physical with metaphysical, as where he says of the ships that brought home the royal brothers, that

“ the joyful London meets  
The princely York, himself alone a freight,  
The Swiftsure groans beneath great Gloster’s weight,”

and speaks of the

“ repeated prayer  
Which stormed the skies and ravished Charles from thence.”

There is also a certain every-dayness, not to say vulgarity, of phrase, which Dryden never wholly refined away, and which continually tempts us to sum up at once against him as the

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\* Essay on the Origin and Progress of Satire.

greatest poet that ever was or could be made wholly out of prose.

“Heaven would no bargain for its blessings drive”

is an example. On the other hand, there are a few verses almost worthy of his best days, as these:—

“Some lazy ages lost in sleep and ease,  
No action leave to busy chronicles;  
Such whose *supine felicity* but makes  
In story chasms, in epochas mistakes,  
O’er whom Time gently shakes his wings of down,  
Till with his silent sickle they are mown.”

These are all the more characteristic, that Dryden, unless in argument, is seldom equal for six lines together. In the poem to Lord Clarendon (1662) there are four verses that have something of the “energy divine” for which Pope praised his master.

“Let envy, then, those crimes within you see  
From which the happy never must be free;  
Envy that does with misery reside,  
The joy and the revenge of ruined pride.”

In his “Aurengzebe” (1675) there is a passage, of which, as it is a good example of Dryden, I shall quote the whole, though my purpose aims mainly at the latter verses:—

“When I consider life, ’t is all a cheat;  
Yet, fooled with Hope, men favor the deceit,  
Trust on, and think to-morrow will repay;  
To-morrow ’s falser than the former day,  
Lies worse, and, while it says we shall be blest  
With some new joys, cuts off what we possess.  
Strange cozenage! none would live past years again,  
Yet all hope pleasure in what yet remain,  
And from the dregs of life think to receive  
What the first sprightly running could not give.  
I’m tired of waiting for this chymic gold  
Which fools us young and beggars us when old.”

The “first sprightly running” of Dryden’s vintage was, it must be confessed, a little muddy, if not beery; but if his own soil did not produce grapes of the choicest flavor, he knew where they were to be had; and his product, like sound wine, grew better the longer it stood upon the lees. He tells us, evidently thinking of himself, that in a poet, “from fifty to threescore, the balance generally holds even in our colder

climates, for he loses not much in fancy, and judgment, which is the effect of observation, still increases. His succeeding years afford him little more than the stubble of his own harvest, yet, if his constitution be healthful, his mind may still retain a decent vigor, and the gleanings of that of Ephraim, "in comparison with others, will surpass the vintage of Abiezer." \* Since Chaucer, none of our poets has had a constitution more healthful, and it was his old age that yielded the best of him. In him the understanding was, perhaps, in overplus for his entire good fortune as a poet, and that is a faculty among the earliest to mature. We have seen him, at only ten years, divining the power of reason in Polybius.† The same turn of mind led him later to imitate the French school of tragedy, and to admire in Ben Jonson the most correct of English poets. It was his imagination that needed quickening, and it is very curious to trace through his different prefaces the gradual opening of his eyes to the causes of the solitary pre-eminence of Shakespeare. At first he is sensible of an attraction towards him which he cannot explain, and for which he apologizes, as if it were wrong. But he feels himself drawn more and more strongly, till at last he ceases to resist altogether, and is forced to acknowledge that there is something in this one man that is not and never was anywhere else, something not to be reasoned about, ineffable, divine; if contrary to the rules, so much the worse for *them*. It may be conjectured that Dryden's Puritan associations may have stood in the way of his more properly poetic culture, and that his early knowledge of Shakespeare was slight. He tells us that Davenant, whom he could not have known before he himself was twenty-seven, first taught him to admire the great poet. But even after his imagination had become conscious of its prerogative, and his expression had been ennobled by frequenting this higher society, we find him continually dropping back into that *sermo pedestris* which seems, on the whole, to have been his more natural element. We always feel his epoch in him, that he was the lock which let our language

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\* Dedication of the Georgics.

† Dryden's penetration is always remarkable. His general judgment of Polybius coincides remarkably with that of Mommsen. (Röm. Gesch. ii. 448, seq.)

down from its point of highest poetry to its level of easiest and most gently flowing prose. His enthusiasm needs the contagion of other minds to arouse it; but his strong sense, his command of the happy word, his wit, which is distinguished by a certain breadth and, as it were, power of generalization, as Pope's by keenness of edge and point, were his, whether he would or no. Accordingly, his poetry is often best and his verse more flowing where (as in parts of his version of the twenty-ninth ode of the third book of Horace) he is amplifying the suggestions of another mind.\* Viewed from one side, he justifies Milton's remark of him, that "he was a good rhymist, but no poet." To look at all sides, and to distrust the verdict of a single mood, is, no doubt, the duty of a critic. But how if a certain side be so often presented as to thrust forward in the memory and disturb it in the effort to recall that total impression (for the office of a critic is not, though often so misunderstood, to say *guilty* or *not guilty* of some particular fact), which is the only safe ground of judgment? It is the weight of the whole man, not of one or the other limb of him, that we want. *Expende Hannibalem*. Very good, but not in a scale capacious only of a single quality at a time, for it is their union, and not their addition, that assures the value of each separately. It was not this or that which gave him his weight in council, his swiftness of decision in battle, that outran the forethought of other men, — it was Hannibal. But this prosaic element in Dryden will force itself upon me. As I read him, I cannot help thinking of an ostrich, to be classed with flying things, and capable, what with leap and flap together, of leaving the earth for a longer or shorter space, but loving the open plain, where wing and foot help each other to something that is both flight and run at once.

We have arrived at Dryden's thirty-second year, and thus far have found little in him to warrant an augury that he was ever to be one of the *great* names in English literature, the most perfect type, that is, of his class, and that class a high one, though not the highest. If Joseph de Maistre's axiom, *Qui n'a pas vaincu à trente ans, ne vaincra jamais*, were true,

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\* "I have taken some pains to make it my masterpiece in English." — Preface to Second Miscellany. Fox said that it "was better than the original."

there would be little hope of him, for he has won no battle yet. But there is something solid and doughty in the man, that can rise from defeat, the stuff of which victories are made in due time, when we are able to choose our position better, and the sun is at our back. Hitherto his performances have been mainly of the *obligato* sort, at which few men of original force are good, least of all Dryden, who had always something of stiffness in his strength. Waller had praised the living Cromwell in perhaps the manliest verses he ever wrote, — not *very* manly to be sure, but really elegant, and, on the whole, better than those in which Dryden squeezed out melodious tears. Waller, who had also made himself conspicuous as a volunteer Antony to the country squire turned Cæsar,

(“With ermine clad and purple, let him hold  
A royal sceptre made of Spanish gold,”)

was more servile than Dryden in hailing the return of *ex officio* Majesty. He bewails to Charles, in snuffing heroics,

“our sorrow and our crime  
To have accepted life so long a time,  
Without you here.”

A weak man, put to the test by rough and angry times, as Waller was, may be pitied, but meanness is nothing but contemptible under any circumstances. If it be true that “every conqueror creates a Muse,” Cromwell was unfortunate. Even Milton’s sonnet, though dignified, is reserved if not distrustful. Marvell’s “Horatian Ode,” the most truly classic in our language, is worthy of its theme. The same poet’s Elegy, in parts noble, and everywhere humanly tender, is worth more than all Carlyle’s biography as a witness to the gentler qualities of the hero, and of the deep affection that stalwart nature could inspire in hearts of truly masculine temper. As it is little known, a few verses of it may be quoted to show the difference between grief that thinks of its object and grief that thinks of its rhymes.

“Valor, religion, friendship, prudence died  
At once with him, and all that’s good beside,  
And we, death’s refuse, nature’s dregs, confined  
To loathsome life, alas! are left behind.  
Where we (so once we used) shall now no more,  
To fetch day, press about his chamber-door,



No more shall hear that powerful language charm,  
 Whose force oft spared the labor of his arm,  
 No more shall follow where he spent the days  
 In war or counsel, or in prayer and praise.

I saw him dead; a leaden slumber lies,  
 And mortal sleep, over those wakeful eyes;  
 Those gentle rays under the lids were fled,  
 Which through his looks that piercing sweetness shed;  
 That port, which so majestic was and strong,  
 Loose and deprived of vigor stretched along,  
 All withered, all discolored, pale, and wan,  
 How much another thing! no more That Man!  
 O human glory! vain! O death! O wings!  
 O worthless world! O transitory things!  
 Yet dwelt that greatness in his shape decayed  
 That still, though dead, greater than Death he laid,  
 And, in his altered face, you something feign  
 That threatens Death he yet will live again."

Such verses might not satisfy Lindley Murray, but they are of that higher mood which satisfies the heart. These couplets, too, have an energy worthy of Milton's friend:—

"When up the armed mountains of Dunbar  
 He marched, and through deep Severn, ending war."  
 "Thee, many ages hence, in martial verse  
 Shall the English soldier, ere he charge, rehearse."

On the whole, one is glad that Dryden's panegyric on the Protector was so poor. It was purely official verse-making. Had there been any feeling in it, there had been baseness in his address to Charles. As it is, we may fairly assume that he was so far sincere in both cases as to be thankful for a chance to exercise himself in rhyme, without much caring whether upon a funeral or a restoration. He might naturally enough expect that poetry would have a better chance under Charles than under Cromwell, or any successor with Commonwealth principles. Cromwell had more serious matters to think about than verses, while Charles might at least care as much about them as it was in his base good-nature to care about anything but loose women and spaniels. Dryden's sound sense, afterwards so conspicuous, shows itself even in these pieces, when we can get at it through the tangled thicket of tropical phrase.

The authentic and unmistakable Dryden first manifests himself in some verses addressed to his friend Dr. Charlton in 1663. We have first his common sense, which has almost the point of wit, yet with a tang of prose : —

“ The longest tyranny that ever swayed  
Was that wherein our ancestors betrayed  
Their freeborn reason to the Stagyrite,  
And made his torch their universal light.  
*So truth, while only one supplied the state,  
Grew scarce and dear and yet sophisticate.  
Still it was bought, like emp’ric wares or charms,  
Hard words sealed up with Aristotle’s arms.*”

Then we have his graceful sweetness of fancy, where he speaks of the inhabitants of the New World : —

“ Guiltless men who danced away their time,  
Fresh as their groves and happy as their clime.”

And, finally, there is a hint of imagination where “mighty visions of the Danish race” watch round Charles sheltered in Stonehenge after the battle of Worcester. These passages might have been written by the Dryden whom we learn to know fifteen years later. They have the advantage that he wrote them to please himself. His contemporary Dr. Heylin said of French cooks, that “their trade was not to feed the belly, but the palate.” Dryden was a great while in learning this secret, as available in good writing as in cookery. He strove after it, but his thoroughly English nature, to the last, would too easily content itself with serving up the honest beef of his thought, without regard to daintiness of flavor in the dressing of it.\* Of the best English poetry, it might be said that it is understanding aerated by imagination. In Dryden the solid part too often refused to mix kindly with the leaven, either remaining lumpish or rising to a hasty puff.

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\* In one of the last letters he ever wrote, thanking his cousin Mrs. Steward for a gift of marrow-puddings, he says : “ A chine of honest bacon would please my appetite more than all the marrow-puddings ; for I like them better plain, having a very vulgar stomach.” So of Cowley he says : “ There was plenty enough, but ill sorted, whole pyramids of sweetmeats for boys and women, but little of solid meat for men.” The physical is a truer antitype of the spiritual man than we are willing to admit, and the brain is often forced to acknowledge the inconvenient country-cousinship of the stomach.

finess. Grace and lightness were with him much more a laborious achievement than a natural gift, and it is all the more remarkable that he should so often have attained to what seems such an easy perfection in both. Always a hasty writer,\* he was long in forming his style, and to the last was apt to snatch the readiest word rather than wait for the fittest. He was not wholly and unconsciously poet, but a thinker who sometimes lost himself on enchanted ground and was transfigured by its touch. This preponderance in him, of the reasoning over the intuitive faculties, the one always there, the other flashing in when you least expect it, accounts for that inequality and even incongruousness in his writing which make one revise his judgment at every tenth page. In his prose you come upon passages that persuade you he is a poet, in spite of his verses so often turning state's evidence against him as to convince you he is none. For example, take this bit of prose from the dedication of his version of Virgil's *Pastorals*, 1694: "He found the strength of his genius betimes, and was even in his youth preluding to his *Georgicks* and his *Æneis*. He could not forbear to try his wings, though his pinions were not hardened to maintain a long, laborious flight; yet sometimes they bore him to a pitch as lofty as ever he was able to reach afterwards. But when he was admonished by his subject to descend, he came down gently circling in the air and singing to the ground, like a lark melodious in her mounting and continuing her song till she alights, still preparing for a higher flight at her next sally, and tuning her voice to better music." This is charming, and yet even this wants the ethereal tincture that pervades the style of Jeremy Taylor, making it, as Burke said of Sheridan's eloquence, "neither prose nor poetry, but something better than either." Let us compare Taylor's treatment of the same image: "For so have I seen a lark, rising from her bed of grass and soaring upwards, singing as he rises, and hopes to get to heaven and climb above the clouds; but the poor bird

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\* In his Preface to "All for Love" he says, evidently alluding to himself: "If he have a friend whose hastiness in writing is his greatest fault, Horace would have taught him to have minced the matter, and to have called it readiness of thought and a flowing fancy." And in the Preface to the *Fables* he says of Homer: "This vehemence of his, I confess, is more suitable to my temper." He makes other allusions to it.

was beaten back by the loud sighings of an eastern wind, and his motion made irregular and inconstant, descending more at every breath of the tempest than it could recover by the libration and frequent weighing of his wings, till the little creature was forced to sit down and pant, and stay till the storm was over, and then it made a prosperous flight, and did rise and sing as if it had learned music and motion of an angel as he passed sometimes through the air about his ministries here below." Taylor's fault is that his sentences too often smell of the library, but what an open air is here! How unpremeditated it all seems! How carelessly he knots each new thought, as it comes, to the one before it with an *and*, like a girl making lace! And what a slidingly musical use he makes of the sibilants with which our language is unjustly taxed by those who can only make them hiss, not sing! There are twelve of them in the first twenty words, fifteen of which are monosyllables. We notice the structure of Dryden's periods, but this grows up as we read. It gushes, like the song of the bird itself,

"In profuse strains of unpremeditated art."

Let us now take a specimen of Dryden's bad prose from one of his poems. I open the "*Annus Mirabilis*" at random, and hit upon this:—

"Our little fleet was now engaged so far,  
That, like the swordfish in the whale, they fought:  
The combat only seemed a civil war,  
Till through their bowels we our passage wrought."

Is this Dryden, or Sternhold, or Shadwell, those Toms who made him say that "dulness was fatal to the name of Tom"? The natural history of Goldsmith in the verse of Pye! His thoughts did not "voluntary move harmonious numbers." He had his choice between prose and verse, and seems to be poetical on second thought. I do not speak without book. He seems to have been conscious of it himself. In the same letter to Mrs. Steward, just cited, he says, "I am still drudging on, always a poet and never a good one"; and this from no mock-modesty, for he is always handsomely frank in telling us whatever of his own doing pleased him. This was written in the

last year of his life, and at about the same time he says elsewhere: "What judgment I had increases rather than diminishes, and thoughts, such as they are, come crowding in so fast upon me that my only difficulty is to choose or to reject, to run them into verse or to give them the other harmony of prose; I have so long studied and practised both, that they are grown into a habit and become familiar to me." \* I think that a man who was primarily a poet would hardly have felt this equanimity of choice.

I find a confirmation of this feeling about Dryden in his early literary loves. His taste was not an instinct, but the slow result of reflection and of the manfulness with which he always acknowledged to himself his own mistakes. In this latter respect few men deal so magnanimously with themselves as he, and accordingly few have been so happily inconsistent. *Ancora imparo* might have served him for a motto as well as Michael Angelo. His prefaces are a complete log of his life, and the habit of writing them was a useful one to him, for it forced him to think with a pen in his hand, which, according to Goethe, "if it do no other good, keeps the mind from staggering about." In these prefaces we see his taste gradually rising from Du Bartas to Spenser, from Cowley to Milton, from Corneille to Shakespeare. "I remember when I was a boy," he says in his dedication of the "Spanish Friar," 1681, "I thought inimitable Spenser a mean poet in comparison of Sylvester's *Du Bartas*, and was rapt into an ecstasy when I read these lines:—

‘ Now when the winter’s keener breath began  
To crystallize the Baltic ocean,  
To glaze the lakes, to bridle up the floods,  
And periwig with snow † the baldpate woods.’

I am much deceived if this be not abominable fustian." Swift, in his "Tale of a Tub," has a ludicrous passage in this style:

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\* Preface to the Fables.

† *Wool* is Sylvester's word. Dryden reminds us of Burke in this also, that he always quotes from memory and seldom exactly. His memory was better for things than for words. This helps to explain the length of time it took him to master that vocabulary at last so various, full, and seemingly extemporaneous. He is a large quoter, though, with his usual inconsistency, he says, "I am no admirer of quotations." (Essays on Heroic Plays.)

“Look on this globe of earth, you will find it to be a very complete and fashionable dress. What is that which some call *land*, but a fine coat faced with green? or the *sea*, but a waist-coat of water-tabby? Proceed to the particular works of creation, you will find how curious journeyman Nature has been to trim up the vegetable *beaux*; observe how *sparkish a periwig adorns the head of a beech*, and what a fine doublet of white satin is worn by the birch.” The fault is not in any inaptness of the images, nor in the mere vulgarity of the things themselves, but in that of the associations they awaken. The “prithee, undo this button” of Lear, coming where it does and expressing what it does, is one of those touches of the pathetically sublime, of which only Shakespeare ever knew the secret. Herrick, too, has a charming poem on “Julia’s petticoat,” the charm being that he lifts the familiar and the low to the region of sentiment. In the passage from Sylvester, it is precisely the reverse, and the wig takes as much from the sentiment as it adds to a Lord Chancellor. So Pope’s proverbial verse,

“True wit is Nature to advantage drest,”

unpleasantly suggests Nature under the hands of a lady’s-maid.\* We have no word in English that will exactly define this want of propriety in diction. *Vulgar* is too strong, and *commonplace* too weak. Perhaps *bourgeois* comes as near as any. It is to be noticed that Dryden does not unequivocally condemn the passage he quotes, but qualifies it with an “if I am not much mistaken.” Indeed, though his judgment in substantials, like that of Johnson, is always worth having, his taste, the negative half of genius, never altogether refined itself from a colloquial familiarity, which is one of the charms of his prose, and gives that air of easy strength in which his satire is unmatched. In his “Royal Martyr” (1669) the tyrant Maximin says to the gods:—

“Keep you your rain and sunshine in the skies,  
And I’ll keep back my flume and sacrifice;  
*Your trade of Heaven shall soon be at a stand,*  
*And all your goods lie dead upon your hand,”*—

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\* In the *Epimetheus* of a poet usually as elegant as Gray himself, one’s finer sense is a little jarred by the

“Spectral gleam their snow-white dresses.”

a passage which has as many faults as only Dryden was capable of committing, even to a false idiom forced by the last rhyme. The same tyrant in dying exclaims : —

“ And after thee I ’ll go,  
Revening still, and following e’en to th’ other world my blow,  
And, *shoving back this earth on which I sit,*  
*I ’ll mount and scatter all the gods I hit.*”

In the “ Conquest of Grenada ” (1670), we have : —

“ This little loss in our vast body shews  
So small, that *half have never heard the news ;*  
*Fame ’s out of breath e’er she can fly so far*  
*To tell ’em all that you have e’er made war.*” \*

And in the same play,

“ That busy thing,  
*The soul, is packing up, and just on wing*  
*Like parting swallows when they seek the spring,*”

where the last sweet verse curiously illustrates that inequality (poetry on a prose background) which so often puzzles us in Dryden. Infinitely worse is the speech of Almanzor to his mother’s ghost : —

“ I ’ll rush into the covert of the night  
And pull thee backward by the shroud to light,  
Or else I ’ll squeeze thee like a bladder there,  
And make thee groan thyself away to air.”

What wonder that Dryden should have been substituted for Davenant as the butt of the “ Rehearsal,” and that the parody should have had such a run ? And yet it was Dryden who, in speaking of Persius, hit upon the happy phrase of “ boisterous metaphors ” ; † it was Dryden who said of Cowley, whom he elsewhere calls “ the darling of my youth,” ‡ that he was “ sunk in reputation because he could never forgive any conceit which came in his way, but swept, like a drag-net, great and

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\* This probably suggested to Young the grandiose image in his “ Last Day ” (B. ii.) : —

“ Those overwhelming armies . . .  
Whose rear lay wrapt in night, while breaking dawn  
Roused the broad front and called the battle on.”

This, to be sure, is no plagiarism ; but we catch the poets of the next half-century oftener with their hands in Dryden’s pockets than in those of any one else.

† Essay on Satire.

‡ Ibid.

small." \* But the passages I have thus far cited as specimens of our poet's coarseness (for poet he surely was *intus*, though not always *in cute*) were written before he was forty, and he had an odd notion, suitable to his healthy complexion, that poets on the whole improve after that date. Man at forty, he says, "seems to be fully in his summer tropic, . . . and I believe that it will hold in all great poets that, though they wrote before with a certain heat of genius which inspired them, yet that heat was not perfectly digested." † But artificial heat is never to be digested at all, as is plain in Dryden's case. He was a man who warmed slowly, and, in his hurry to supply the market, forced his mind. The result was the same after forty as before. In "*Œdipus*" (1679) we find,

"not one bolt  
Shall err from Thebes, but more be called for, more,  
*New-moulded thunder of a larger size!*"

This play was written in conjunction with Lee, of whom Dryden relates ‡ that, when some one said to him, "It is easy enough to write like a madman," he replied, "No, it is hard to write like a madman, but easy enough to write like a fool," — perhaps the most compendious lecture on poetry ever delivered. The splendid bit of eloquence, which has so much the sheet-iron clang of impeachment thunder (I hope that Dryden is not in the Library of Congress!) is perhaps Lee's. The following passage almost certainly is his: —

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\* Preface to *Fables*. Men are always inclined to revenge themselves on their old idols in the first enthusiasm of conversion to a purer faith. Cowley had all the faults that Dryden loads him with, and yet his popularity was to some extent deserved. He at least had a theory that poetry should soar, not creep, and longed for some expedient, in the failure of natural wings, by which he could lift himself away from the conventional and commonplace. By beating out the substance of Pindar very thin, he contrived a kind of balloon which, tumid with gas, did certainly mount a little, *into* the clouds, if not above them, though sure to come suddenly down with a bump. His odes, indeed, are an alternation of upward jerks and concussions, and smack more of Chapelain than of the Theban, but his prose is very agreeable, — Montaigne and water, perhaps, but with some flavor of the Gascon wine left. The strophe of his ode to Dr. Scarborough, in which he compares his surgical friend, operating for the stone, to Moses striking the rock, more than justifies all the ill that Dryden could lay at his door. It was into precisely such mud-holes that Cowley's Will-o'-the-wisp had misguided him. Men may never wholly shake off a vice, but they are always conscious of it, and hate the tempter.

† Dedication of *Georgics*.

‡ In a letter to Denuis, 1693.



“ Sure t is the end of all things ! Fate has torn  
The lock of Time off, and his head is now  
The ghastly ball of round Eternity ! ”

But the next, in which the soul is likened to the pocket of an indignant housemaid charged with theft, is wholly in Dryden's manner : —

“ No ; I dare challenge heaven to turn me outward,  
And shake my soul quite empty in your sight.”

In the same style, he makes his Don Sebastian (1690) say that he is as much astonished as “ drowsy mortals ” at the last trump,

“ When, called in haste, *they fumble for their limbs,*”

and propose to take upon himself the whole of a crime shared with another by asking Heaven to *charge the bill* on him. And in “ King Arthur,” written ten years after the Preface from which I have quoted his confession about Dubartas, we have a passage precisely in the style he condemned : —

“ Ah for the many souls as but this morn  
Were clothed with flesh and warmed with vital blood,  
But naked now, or *shirted* but with air.”

Dryden too often violated his own admirable rule, that “ an author is not to write all he can, but only all he ought.” \*

English prose is indebted to Dryden for having freed it from the cloister of pedantry. He, more than any other single writer, contributed, as well by precept as example, to give it suppleness of movement and the easier air of the modern world. His own style, juicy with proverbial phrases, has that familiar dignity, so hard to attain, perhaps unattainable except by one who, like Dryden, feels that his position is assured. Charles Cotton is as easy, but not so elegant ; Walton as familiar, but not so flowing ; Swift as idiomatic, but not so elevated, Burke more splendid, but not so equally luminous. That his style was no easy acquisition (though, of course, the aptitude was innate) he himself tells us. In his dedication of “ Troilus and Cressida ” (1679), in which he seems to hint at the erection of an Academy, he says that “ the perfect knowledge of a tongue was never attained by any single person. The Court, the College, and the Town must all be joined in it. And as our English is a composition of the dead and living tongues,

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\* Preface to Fables.

there is required a perfect knowledge, not only of the Greek and Latin, but of the Old German, French, and Italian, and, to help all these, a conversation with those authors of our own who have written with the fewest faults in prose and verse. But how barbarously we yet write and speak your Lordship knows, and I am sufficiently sensible in my own English.\* For I am often put to a stand in considering whether what I write be the idiom of the tongue, or false grammar and non-sense couched beneath that specious name of *Anglicism*, and have no other way to clear my doubts but by translating my English into Latin, and thereby trying what sense the words will bear in a more stable language." *Tantæ molis erat*. Five years later: "The proprieties and delicacies of the English are known to few; it is impossible even for a good wit to understand and practise them without the help of a liberal education, long reading and digesting of those few good authors we have amongst us, the knowledge of men and manners, *the freedom of habitudes and conversation with the best company of both sexes*, and, in short, without wearing off the rust which he contracted while he was laying in a stock of learning." In the passage I have italicized, it will be seen that Dryden lays some stress upon the influence of women in refining language. Swift also, in his plan for an Academy, says: "Now, though I would by no means give ladies the trouble of advising us in the reformation of our language, yet I cannot help thinking that, since they have been left out of all meetings except parties at play, or where worse designs are carried on, our conversation has very much degenerated."† Swift affirms that the language had grown corrupt since the Restoration, and that "the Court, which used to be the standard of propriety and correctness of speech, was then, and, I think, has ever since continued, the worst school in England."‡ He lays the

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\* More than half a century later, Orrery, in his "Remarks" on Swift, says: "We speak and we write at random; and if a man's common conversation were committed to paper, he would be startled *for to* find himself guilty in *so few* sentences of so many solecisms and such false English." I do not remember *for to* anywhere in Dryden's prose. *So few* has long been denized.

† Letter to the Lord High Treasurer.

‡ Ibid. He complains of "manglings and abbreviations." "What does your Lordship think of the words drudg'd, disturb'd, rebuk'd, fledg'd, and a thousand

blame partly on the general licentiousness, partly upon the French education of many of Charles's courtiers, and partly on the poets. Dryden undoubtedly formed his diction by the usage of the court. The age was a very free-and-easy, not to say a very coarse one. Its coarseness was not external, like that of Elizabeth's day, but the outward mark of an inward depravity. What Swift's notion of the refinement of women was may be judged by his anecdotes of Stella. I will not say that Dryden's prose did not gain by the conversational elasticity which his frequenting men and women of the world enabled him to give it. It is the best specimen of every-day style that we have. But the habitual dwelling of his mind in a commonplace atmosphere, and among those easy levels of sentiment which befitted Will's Coffee-house and the Bird-cage Walk, was a damage to his poetry. He cannot always distinguish between enthusiasm and extravagance when he sees them. But, apart from these influences which I have adduced in exculpation, there was certainly a vein of coarseness in him, a want of that exquisite sensitiveness which is the conscience of the artist. An old gentleman, writing to the Gentleman's Magazine in 1745, professes to remember "plain John Dryden (before he paid his court with success to the great) in one uniform clothing of Norwich drugget. I have eat tarts at the Mulberry Garden with him and Madam Reeve, when our author advanced to a sword and Chadreux wig."\* I always fancy

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others?" In a contribution to the "Tatler" (No. 230) he ridicules the use of 'um for *them*, and a number of slang phrases, among which is *mob*. "The war," he says, "has introduced abundance of polysyllables, which will never be able to live many more campaigns." *Speculations, operations, preliminaries, ambassadors, pallisadoes, communication, circumvallation, battalions*, are the instances he gives, and all are now familiar. No man, or body of men, can dam the stream of language. Dryden is rather fond of 'em for *them*, but uses it rarely in his prose. Swift himself prefers 't is to *it is*, as does Emerson still. In what Swift says of the poets, he may be fairly suspected of glancing at Dryden, who was his kinsmen, and whose prefaces and translation of Virgil he ridicules in the "Tale of a Tub." Dryden is reported to have said of him, "Cousin Swift is no poet." The Dean began his literary career by Pindaric odes to Athenian Societies and the like, — perhaps the greatest mistake as to his own powers of which an author was ever guilty. It was very likely that he would send these to his relative, already distinguished, for his opinion upon them. If this was so, the justice of Dryden's judgment must have added to the smart. Swift never forgot or forgave; Dryden was careless enough to do the one, and large enough to do the other.

\* Both Malone and Scott accept this gentleman's evidence without question, but

Dryden in the drugget, with wig, lace ruffles, and sword superimposed. It is the type of this curiously incongruous man.

The first poem by which Dryden won a general acknowledgment of his power was the "Annus Mirabilis," written in his thirty-seventh year. Pepys, himself not altogether a bad judge, doubtless expresses the common opinion when he says: "I am very well pleased this night with reading a poem I brought home with me last night from Westminster Hall, of Dryden's, upon the present war; a very good poem."\* And a very good poem, in some sort, it continues to be, in spite of its amazing blemishes. We must always bear in mind that Dryden lived in an age that supplied him with no ready-made inspiration, and that big phrases and images are apt to be pressed into the service when great ones do not volunteer. With this poem begins the long series of Dryden's prefaces, of which Swift made such excellent, though malicious, fun that I cannot forbear to quote it. "I do utterly disapprove and declare against that pernicious custom of making the *preface* a bill of fare to the book. For I have always looked upon it as a high point of indiscretion in monster-mongers and other retailers of strange sights to hang out a fair picture over the door, drawn after the life, with a most eloquent description underneath; this has saved me many a threepence. . . . Such is exactly the fate at this time of *prefaces*. . . . This expedient was admirable at first; our great Dryden has long carried it as far as it would go, and with incredible success. He

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I confess suspicion of a memory that runs back more than eighty-one years, and recollects a man before he had any claim to remembrance. Dryden was never poor, and there is at Oxford a portrait of him painted in 1664, which represents him in a superb periwig and laced band. This was "before he had paid his court with success to the great." But the story is at least *ben trovato*, and morally true enough to serve as an illustration. Who the "old gentleman" was has never been discovered. Of Crowne (who has some interest for us as a sometime student at Harvard) he says: "Many a cup of metheglin have I drank with little starch'd Johnny Crown; we called him so, from the stiff, unalterable primness of his long cravat." Crowne reflects no more credit on his Alma Mater than Downing. Both were sneaks, and of such a kind as, I think, can only be produced by a debauched Puritanism. Crowne, as a rival of Dryden, is contemptuously alluded to by Cibber in his "Apology."

\* Diary, III. 390. Almost the only notices of Dryden that make him alive to me I have found in the delicious book of this Polonius-Montaigne, the only man who ever had the courage to keep a sincere journal, even under the shelter of cipher.

has often said to me in confidence, ‘that the world would never have suspected him to be so great a poet, if he had not assured them so frequently, in his prefaces, that it was impossible they could either doubt or forget it.’ Perhaps it may be so; however, I much fear his instructions have edified out of their place, and taught men to grow wiser in certain points where he never intended they should.”\* The *monster-mongers* is a terrible thrust, when we remember some of the comedies and heroic plays which Dryden ushered in this fashion. In the dedication of the “Annus” to the city of London is one of those pithy sentences of which Dryden is afterwards so full, and which he lets fall with a carelessness that seems always to deepen the meaning: “I have heard, indeed, of some virtuous persons who have ended unfortunately, but never of any virtuous nation; Providence is engaged too deeply when the cause becomes so general.” In his “account” of the poem in a letter to Sir Robert Howard he says: “I have chosen to write my poem in quatrains or stanzas of four in alternatè rhyme, because I have ever judged them more noble and of greater dignity, both for the sound and number, than any other verse in use amongst us. . . . The learned languages have certainly a great advantage of us in not being tied to the slavery of any rhyme. . . . But in this necessity of our rhymes, I have always found the couplet verse most easy, though not so proper for this occasion; for there the work is sooner at an end, every two lines concluding the labor of the poet.” A little further on: “They [the French] write in alexandrines, or verses of six feet, such as amongst us is the old translation of Homer by Chapman: all which, by lengthening their chain,† makes the sphere of their

\* Tale of a Tub, Sect. V. Pepys also speaks of buying the “Maiden Queen” of Mr. Dryden’s, which he himself, in his preface, seems to brag of, and indeed is a good play.” — 18th January, 1668.

† He is fond of this image. In the “Maiden Queen” Celadon tells Sabina that, when he is with her rival Florimel, his heart is still her prisoner, “it only draws a longer chain after it.” Goldsmith’s fancy was taken by it; and everybody admires in the “Traveller” the extraordinary conceit of a heart dragging a lengthening chain. The smoothness of too many rhymed pentameters is that of thin ice over shallow water; so long as we glide along rapidly, all is well; but if we dwell a moment on any one spot, we may find ourselves knee-deep in mud. A later poet, in trying to improve on Goldsmith, shows the ludicrousness of the image: —

“And round my heart’s leg ties its galling chain.”

To write imaginatively a man should have — imagination!

activity the greater." I have quoted these passages because, in a small compass, they include several things characteristic of Dryden. "I have ever judged," and "I have always found," are particularly so. If he took up an opinion in the morning, he would have found so many arguments for it before night that it would seem already old and familiar. So with his reproach of rhyme; a year or two before he was eagerly defending it;\* again a few years, and he will utterly condemn and drop it in his plays, while retaining it in his translations; afterwards his study of Milton leads him to think that blank verse would suit the epic style better, and he proposes to try it with Homer, but at last translates one book as a specimen, and behold, it is in rhyme! But the charm of this great advocate is, that, whatever side he was on, he could always find excellent reasons for it, and state them with great force, and abundance of happy illustration. He is an exception to the proverb, and is none the worse pleader that he is always pleading his own cause. The blunder about Chapman is of a kind into which his hasty temperament often betrayed him. He remembered that Chapman's "Iliad" was in a long measure, concluded without looking that it was alexandrine, and then attributes it generally to his "Homer." Chapman's "Iliad" is done in fourteen-syllable verse, and his "Odyssee" in the very metre that Dryden himself used in his own version.† I remark also what he says of the couplet, that it was easy because the second verse concludes the labor of the poet. And yet it was Dryden who found it hard for that very reason. His vehement abundance refused those narrow banks, first running over into a triplet, and, even then uncontainable, rising to an alexandrine in the concluding verse. And I have little doubt that it was the roominess, rather than the dignity, of the quatrain which

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\* See his epistle dedicatory to the "Rival Ladies" (1664). For the other side, see particularly a passage in his "Discourse on Epic Poetry" (1697).

† In the same way he had two years before assumed that Shakespeare "was the first who, to shun the pains of continued rhyming, invented that kind of writing which we call blank verse!" Dryden was never, I suspect, a very careful student of English literature. He seems never to have known that Surrey translated a part of the "Æneid" (and with great spirit) into blank verse. Indeed, he was not a scholar, in the proper sense of the word, but he had that faculty of rapid assimilation without study, so remarkable in Coleridge and other rich minds, whose office is rather to impregnate than to invent. These brokers of thought perform a great office in literature, second only to that of originators.

led him to choose it. As apposite to this, I may quote what he elsewhere says of octosyllabic verse: "The thought can turn itself with greater ease in a larger compass. When the rhyme comes too thick upon us, it straightens the expression: we are thinking of the close, when we should be employed in adorning the thought. It makes a poet giddy with turning in a space too narrow for his imagination." \*

Dryden himself, as was often the case with him, was well satisfied with his work. He calls it his best hitherto, and attributes his success to the excellence of his subject, "incomparably the best he had ever had, *excepting only the Royal Family*." The first part is devoted to the Dutch war; the last to the fire of London. The martial half is infinitely the better of the two. He altogether surpasses his model, — Davenant. If his poem lack the gravity of thought attained by a few stanzas of "Gondibert," it is vastly superior in life, in picturesqueness, in the energy of single lines, and, above all, in imagination. Few men have read "Gondibert," and almost every one speaks of it as commonly of the dead, with a certain subdued respect. And it deserves respect as an honest effort to bring poetry back to its highest office in the ideal treatment of life. Davenant emulated Spenser, and if his poem had been as good as his preface, it could still be read in another spirit than that of investigation. As it is, it always reminds me of Goldsmith's famous verse. It is remote, unfriendly, solitary, and, above all, slow. Its shining passages, for there are such, remind one of distress-rockets sent up at intervals from a ship just about to founder, and sadden rather than cheer.†

The first part of the "Annus Mirabilis" is by no means clear of the false taste of the time, ‡ though it has some of Dryden's

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\* Essay on Satire. What he has said just before this about Butler is worth noting. Butler had had a chief hand in the "Rehearsal," but Dryden had no grudges where the question was of giving its just praise to merit.

† The conclusion of the second canto of Book Third is the best continuously fine passage. Dryden's poem has nowhere so much meaning in so small space as Davenant, when he says of the sense of honor that,

"Like Power, it grows to nothing, growing less."

Davenant took the hint of the stanza from Sir John Davies. Wyatt first used it, so far as I know, in English.

‡ Perhaps there is no better lecture on the prevailing vices of style and thought (if thought this frothy ferment of the mind may be called), than in Cotton Mather's

manliest verses and happiest comparisons, always his two distinguishing merits. Here, as almost everywhere else in Dryden, measuring him merely as poet, we recall what he, with pathetic pride, says of himself in the prologue to "Aurengzebe": —

"Let him retire, betwixt two ages cast,  
The first of this, the hindmost of the last."

What can be worse than what he says of comets? —

"Whether they unctuous exhalations are  
Fired by the sun, or seeming so alone,  
Or each some more remote and slippery star  
Which loses footing when to mortals shown."

Or than this, of the destruction of the Dutch India-ships? —

"Amidst whole heaps of spices lights a ball,  
And now their odors armed against them fly;  
Some precious by shattered porcelain fall,  
And some by aromatic splinters die."

Dear Dr. Johnson had his doubts about Shakespeare, but here at least was poetry! This is one of the quatrains which he pronounces "worthy of our author."\*

But Dryden himself has said that "a man who is resolved to praise an author with any appearance of justice must be sure to take him on the strongest side, and where he is least liable to exceptions." This is true also of one who wishes to measure an author fairly, for the higher wisdom of criticism lies in the capacity to admire.

Leser, wie gefall ich dir?

Leser, wie gefällst du mir?

are both fair questions, the answer to the first being more often involved in that to the second than is sometimes thought. The

"Magnalia." For Mather, like a true provincial, appropriates only the mannerism, and, as is usual in such cases, betrays all its weakness by the unconscious parody of exaggeration.

\* The Doctor was a capital judge of the substantial value of the goods he handled, but his judgment always seems that of the thumb and forefinger. For the shades, the disposition of colors, the beauty of the figures, he has as good as no sense whatever. The critical parts of his life of Dryden seem to me the best of his writing in this kind. There is little to be gleaned after him. He had studied his author, which he seldom did, and his criticism is sympathetic, a thing still rarer with him. As illustrative of his own habits, his remarks on Dryden's reading are curious.



poet in Dryden was never more fully revealed than in such verses as these : —

- “ And threatening France, placed like a painted Jove,\*  
Kept idle thunder in his lifted hand ” ;  
“ Silent in smoke of cannon they come on ” ;  
“ And his loud guns speak thick, like angry men ” ;  
“ The vigorous seaman every port-hole plies,  
And adds his heart to every gun he fires ” ;  
“ And, though to me unknown, they sure fought well,  
Whom Rupert led, and who were British born.”

This is masculine writing, and yet it must be said that there is scarcely a quatrain in which the rhyme does not trip him into a platitude, and there are too many swaggering with that *expression forte d'un sentiment faible* which Voltaire condemns in Corneille, — a temptation to which Dryden always lay too invitingly open. But there are passages higher in kind than any I have cited, because they show imagination. Such are the verses in which he describes the dreams of the disheartened enemy : —

- “ In dreams they fearful precipices tread,  
Or, shipwrecked, labor to some distant shore,  
Or in 'dark churches walk among the dead ” ;

and those in which he recalls glorious memories, and sees where

- “ The mighty ghosts of our great Harries rose,  
And armèd Edwards looked with anxious eyes.”

A few verses, like the pleasantly alliterative one in which he makes the spider, “ from the silent ambush of his den,” “ feel far off the trembling of his thread,” show that he was begin-

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\* Perhaps the hint was given by a phrase of Corneille, *monarque en peinture*. Dryden seldom borrows, unless from Shakespeare, without improving, and he borrowed a great deal. Thus in “ Don Sebastian ” (of suicide) : —

- “ Brutus and Cato might discharge their souls,  
And give them furloughs for the other world ;  
But we, like sentries, are obliged to stand  
In starless nights and wait the appointed hour.”

The thought is Cicero's, but how it is intensified by the “ starless nights ” ! In the same play, by a very Drydenish verse, he gives new force to an old comparison : —

- “ And I should break through laws divine and human,  
And think 'em cobwebs spread for little man,  
*Which all the bulky herd of Nature breaks.*”

ning to study the niceties of verse, instead of trusting wholly to what he would have called his natural *fougue*. On the whole, this part of the poem is very good war poetry, as war poetry goes (for there is but one first-rate poem of the kind in English, — short, national, eager as if the writer were personally engaged, with the rapid metre of a drum beating the charge, — and that is Drayton's "Battle of Agincourt"\*) , but it shows more study of Lucan than of Virgil, and for a long time yet we shall find Dryden bewildered by bad models. He is always imitating — no, that is not the word, always emulating — somebody in his more strictly poetical attempts, for in that direction he always needed some external impulse to set his mind in motion. This is more or less true of all authors ; nor does it detract from their originality, which depends wholly on their being able so far to forget themselves as to let something of themselves slip into what they write. Of absolute originality we will not speak till authors are raised by some Deucalion-and-Pyrrha process ; and even then our faith would be small, for writers who have no past are pretty sure of having no future. Dryden, at any rate, always had to have his copy set him at the top of the page, and wrote ill or well accordingly. His mind (somewhat solid for a poet) warmed slowly, but, once fairly heated through, he had more of that good-luck of self-oblivion than most men. He certainly gave even a liberal interpretation to Molière's rule of taking his own property wherever he found it, though he sometimes blundered awkwardly about what was properly *his* ; but in literature, it should be remembered, a thing always becomes his at last who says it best, and thus makes it his own.†

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\* Not his solemn historical droning under that title, but addressed "To the Cambrío-Britons on their harp."

† For example, Waller had said,

"Others may use the ocean as their road,  
Only the English *make it their abode* ;

*We tread on billows with a steady foot,*"

long before Campbell. Campbell helps himself to both thoughts, enlivens them into

"Her march is o'er the mountain wave,  
Her home is on the deep,"

and they are his forevermore. His "leviathans afloat" he *lifted* from the "Annus Mirabilis" ; but in what court could Dryden sue ? Again, Waller in another poem calls the Duke of York's flag

Mr. Savage Landor once told me that he said to Wordsworth: "Mr. Wordsworth, a man may mix poetry with prose as much as he pleases, and it will only elevate and enliven; but the moment he mixes a particle of prose with his poetry, it precipitates the whole." Wordsworth, he added, never forgave him. The always hasty Dryden, as I think I have already said, was liable, like a careless apothecary's 'prentice, to make the same confusion of ingredients, especially in the more mischievous way. I cannot leave the "*Annus Mirabilis*" without giving an example of this. Describing the Dutch prizes, rather like an auctioneer than a poet, he says that

"Some English wool, vexed in a Belgian loom,  
And into cloth of spongy softness made,  
Did into France or colder Denmark doom,  
To ruin with worse ware our staple trade."

One might fancy this written by the secretary of a board of trade in an unguarded moment; but we should remember that the poem is dedicated to the city of London. The depreciation of the rival fabrics is exquisite; and Dryden, the most English of our poets, would not be so thoroughly English if he had not in him some fibre of *la nation bontiquière*. Let us now see how he succeeds in attempting to infuse science (the most obstinately prosy material) with poetry. Speaking of "a more exact knowledge of the longitudes," as he explains in a note, he tells us that,

"Then we upon our globe's last verge shall go,  
And view the ocean leaning on the sky;  
From thence our rolling neighbors we shall know,  
And on the lunar world securely pry."

Dr. Johnson confesses that he does not understand this. Why should he, when it is plain that Dryden was wholly in the dark himself? To understand it is none of my business, but I confess that it interests me as an Americanism. We have hitherto been credited as the inventors of the "jumping-off

"His dreadful streamer, like a comet's hair";

and this, I believe, is the first application of the celestial portent to this particular comparison. Yet Milton's "imperial ensign" waves defiant behind his impregnable lines, and even Campbell flaunts his "meteor flag" in Waller's face. Gray's bard might be sent to the lock-up, but even he would find bail.

"C'est imiter quelqu'un que de planter des choux."

place " at the extreme western verge of the world. But Dryden was beforehand with us. Though he doubtless knew that the earth was a sphere (and perhaps that it was flattened at the poles), it was always a flat surface in his fancy. In his "Amphitryon," he makes Alcmena say :—

" No, I would fly thee to the ridge of earth,  
And leap the precipice to 'scape thy sight."

And in his "Spanish Friar," Lorenzo says to Elvira that they "will travel together to the ridge of the world, and then drop together into the next." It is idle for us poor Yankees to hope that we can invent anything. To say sooth, if Dryden had left nothing behind him but the "Annus Mirabilis," he might have served as a type of the kind of poet America would have produced by the biggest-river-and-tallest-mountain recipe, longitude and latitude in plenty, with marks of culture scattered here and there like the *carets* on a proof-sheet.

It is now time to say something of Dryden as a dramatist. In the thirty-two years between 1662 and 1694 he produced twenty-five plays, and assisted Lee in two. I have hinted that it took Dryden longer than most men to find the true bent of his genius. On a superficial view, he might almost seem to confirm that theory, maintained by Johnson, among others, that genius was nothing more than great intellectual power exercised persistently in some particular direction which chance decided; so that it lay in circumstance merely whether a man should turn out a Shakespeare or a Newton. But when we come to compare what he wrote, regardless of Minerva's averted face, with the spontaneous production of his happier muse, we shall be inclined to think his example one of the strongest cases against the theory in question. He began his dramatic career, as usual, by rowing against the strong current of his nature, and pulled only the more doggedly the more he felt himself swept down the stream. His first attempt was at comedy, and, though his earliest piece of that kind (the "Wild Gallant," 1663) utterly failed, he wrote eight others afterwards. On the 23d February, 1663, Pepys writes in his diary: "To Court, and there saw the 'Wild Gallant' performed by the king's house; but it was ill acted, and the play so poor a thing

as I never saw in my life almost, and so little answering the name, that, from the beginning to the end, I could not, nor can at this time, tell certainly which was the Wild Gallant. The king did not seem pleased at all the whole play, nor anybody else." After some alteration, it was revived with more success. On its publication in 1669 Dryden honestly admitted its former failure, though with a kind of salvo for his self-love. "I made the town my judges, and the greater part condemned it. After which I do not think it my concernment to defend it with the ordinary zeal of a poet for his decried poem, though Corneille is more resolute in his preface before '*Pertharite*,'\* which was condemned more universally than this. . . . Yet it was received at Court, and was more than once the divertisement of his Majesty, by his own command." Pepys lets us amusingly behind the scenes in the matter of his Majesty's divertisement. Dryden does not seem to see that in the condemnation of something meant to amuse the public there can be no question of degree. To fail at all is to fail utterly.

*"Tous les genres sont permis, hors le genre ennuyeux."*

In the reading, at least, all Dryden's comic writing for the stage must be ranked with the latter class. He himself would fain make an exception of the "Spanish Friar," but I confess that I rather wonder at than envy those who can be amused by it. His comedies lack everything that a comedy should have, —lightness, quickness of transition, unexpectedness of incident, easy cleverness of dialogue, and humorous contrast of character brought out by identity of situation. The comic parts of the "Maiden Queen" seem to me Dryden's best, but the merit even of these is Shakespeare's, and there is little choice where even the best is only tolerable. The common quality, however, of all Dryden's comedies is their nastiness, the more remarkable because we have ample evidence that he was a man of modest conversation. Pepys, who was by no means squeamish (for he found "Sir Martin Marall" "the most entire piece of mirth . . . that certainly ever was writ . . . very good wit therein, not fooling"), writes in his diary of the 19th June, 1668: "My

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\* Corneille's tragedy of "*Pertharite*" was acted unsuccessfully in 1659. Racine made free use of it in his more fortunate "*Andromaque*."

wife and Deb to the king's playhouse to-day, thinking to spy me there, and saw the new play 'Evening Love,' of Dryden's, which, though the world commends, she likes not." The next day he saw it himself, "and do not like it, it being very smutty, and nothing so good as the 'Maiden Queen' or the 'Indian Emperor' of Dryden's making. *I was troubled at it.*" On the 22d he adds: "Calling this day at Herringman's,\* he tells me Dryden do himself call it but a fifth-rate play." This was no doubt true, and yet, though Dryden in his preface to the play says, "I confess I have given [yielded] too much to the people in it, and am ashamed for them as well as for myself, that I have pleased them at so cheap a rate," he takes care to add, "not that there is anything here that I would not defend to an ill-natured judge." The plot was from Calderon, and the author, rebutting the charge of plagiarism, tells us that the king ("without whose command they should no longer be troubled with anything of mine") had already answered for him by saying, "that he only desired that they who accused me of theft would always steal him plays like mine." Of the morals of the play he has not a word, nor do I believe that he was conscious of any harm in them till he was attacked by Collier, and then (with some protest against what he considers the undue severity of his censor) he had the manliness to confess that he had done wrong. "It becomes me not to draw my pen in the defence of a bad cause, when I have so often drawn it for a good one."† And in a letter to his correspondent, Mrs. Thomas, written only a few weeks before his death, warning her against the example of Mrs. Behn, he says, with remorseful sincerity: "I confess I am the last man in the world who ought in justice to arraign her, who have been myself too much a libertine in most of my poems, which I should be well contented I had time either to purge or to see them fairly burned." Congreve was less patient, and even Dryden, in the last epilogue he ever wrote, attempts an excuse: —

"Perhaps the Parson stretched a point too far,  
When with our Theatres he waged a war;  
He tells you that this very moral age  
Received the first infection from the Stage,

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\* Dryden's publisher.

† Preface to the Fables.

But sure a banished Court, with lewdness fraught,  
The seeds of open vice returning brought.

Whitehall the naked Venus first revealed,  
Who, standing, as at Cyprus, in her shrine,  
The strumpet was adored with rites divine.

The poets, who must live by courts or starve,  
Were proud so good a Government to serve,  
And, mixing with buffoons and pimps profane,  
Tainted the Stage for some small snip of gain."

Dryden least of all men should have stooped to this palliation, for he had, not without justice, said of himself: "The same parts and application which have made me a poet might have raised me to any honors of the gown." Milton and Marvell neither lived by the Court nor starved. Charles Lamb most ingeniously defends the Comedy of the Restoration as "the sanctuary and quiet Alsatia of hunted casuistry," where there was no pretence of representing a real world.\* But this was certainly not so. Dryden again and again boasts of the superior advantage which his age had over that of the elder dramatists, in painting polite life, and attributes it to a greater freedom of intercourse between the poets and the frequenters of the Court.† We shall be less surprised at the *kind* of refinement upon which Dryden congratulated himself, when we learn (from the dedication of "Marriage à la Mode") that the Earl of Rochester was its exemplar: "The best comic writers of our age will join with me to acknowledge that they have copied the gallantries of courts, the delicacy of expression, and the decencies of behavior from your Lordship." In judging Dryden, it should be borne in mind that for some years he was under contract to deliver three plays a year, a kind of bond to which no man should subject his brain who has a decent respect for the quality of its products. We should remember, too, that in his day *manners* meant what we call *morals*, that custom always makes a larger part of virtue among average men than they are quite aware, and that the

\* I interpret some otherwise ambiguous passages in this charming and acute essay by its title, "On the *artificial* comedy of the last century."

† See especially his defence of the epilogue to the Second Part of the "Conquest of Granada" (1672).

reaction from an outward conformity that had no root in inward faith may for a time have given to the frank expression of laxity an air of honesty that made it seem almost refreshing. There is no such hotbed for excess of license as excess of restraint, and the arrogant fanaticism of a single virtue is apt to make men suspicious of tyranny in all the rest. But the riot of emancipation could not last long, for the more tolerant society is of private vice, the more exacting will it be of public decorum, that excellent thing, so often the plausible substitute for things more excellent. By 1678 the public mind had so far recovered its tone that Dryden's comedy of "Limberham" was barely tolerated for three nights. I will let the man who looked at human nature from more sides, and therefore judged it more gently than any other, give the only excuse possible for Dryden: —

" Men's judgments are  
A parcel of their fortunes, and things outward  
Do draw the inward quality after them  
To suffer all alike."

Dryden's own apology only makes matters worse for him by showing that he committed his offences with his eyes wide open, and that he wrote comedies so wholly in despite of nature as never to deviate into the comic. Failing as clown, he did not scruple to take on himself the office of Chiffinch to the palled appetite of the public. "For I confess my chief endeavours are to delight the age in which I live. If the humour of this be for low comedy, small accidents, and raillery, I will force my genius to obey it, though with more reputation I could write in verse. I know I am not so fitted by nature to write comedy: I want that gayety of humour which is requisite to it. My conversation is slow and dull, my humour saturnine and reserved: In short, I am none of those who endeavour to break jests in company or make repartees. So that those who decry my comedies do me no injury, except it be in point of profit: Reputation in them is the last thing to which I shall pretend."\* For my own part, though I have been forced to hold my nose in picking my way through these ordures of Dryden, I am free to say that I think them far less morally mis-

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\* Defence of an Essay on Dramatick Poesy.



chievous than that *corps-de-ballet* literature in which the most animal of the passions is made more temptingly naked by a veil of French gauze. Nor does Dryden's lewdness leave such a reek in the mind as the filthy cynicism of Swift, who delighted to uncover the nakedness of our common mother.

It is pleasant to follow Dryden into the more congenial region of heroic plays, though here also we find him making a false start. Anxious to please the king,\* and so able a reasoner as to convince even himself of the justice of whatever cause he argued, he not only wrote tragedies in the French style, but defended his practice in an essay which is by far the most delightful reproduction of the classic dialogue ever written in English. Eugenius (Lord Buckhurst), Lisideius (Sir Charles Sidley), Crites (Sir R. Howard), and Neander (Dryden) are the four partakers in the debate. The comparative merits of ancients and moderns, of the Shakespearian and contemporary drama, of rhyme and blank verse, the value of the three (supposed) Aristotelian unities, are the main topics discussed. The tone of the discussion is admirable, midway between bookishness and talk, and the fairness with which each side of the argument is treated shows the breadth of Dryden's mind perhaps better than any other one piece of his writing. There are no men of straw set up to be knocked down again, as there commonly are in debates conducted upon this plan. The "Defence" of the Essay is to be taken as a supplement to Neander's share in it, as well as many scattered passages in subsequent prefaces and dedications. All the interlocutors agree that "the sweetness of English verse was never understood or practised by our fathers," and that "our poesy is much improved by the happiness of some writers yet living, who first taught us to mould our thoughts into easy and significant words, to retrench the superfluities of expression, and to make our rhyme so properly a part of the verse that it should never mislead the sense, but itself be led and governed by it." In another place he shows that by "living writers" he meant Waller and Denham. "Rhyme has all the advantages

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\* "The favor which heroick plays have lately found upon our theatres has been wholly derived to them from the countenance and approbation they have received at Court." (Dedication of "Indian Emperor" to Duchess of Monmouth.)

of prose besides its own. But the excellence and dignity of it were never fully known till Mr. Waller taught it: he first made writing easily an art; first showed us to conclude the sense, most commonly in distiches, which in the verse before him runs on for so many lines together that the reader is out of breath to overtake it."\* Dryden afterwards changed his mind, and one of the excellences of his own rhymed verse is, that his sense is too ample to be concluded by the distich. Rhyme had been censured as unnatural in dialogue; but Dryden replies that it is no more so than blank verse, since no man talks any kind of verse in real life. But the argument for rhyme is of another kind. "I am satisfied if it cause delight, for delight is the chief if not the only end of poesy [he should have said *means*]; instruction can be admitted but in the second place, for poesy only instructs as it delights. . . . The converse, therefore, which a poet is to imitate must be heightened with all the arts and ornaments of poesy, and must be such as, strictly considered, could never be supposed spoken by any without premeditation. . . . Thus prose, though the rightful prince, yet is by common consent deposed as too weak for the government of serious plays, and, he failing, there now start up two competitors: one the nearer in blood, which is blank verse; the other more fit for the ends of government, which is rhyme. Blank verse is, indeed, the nearer prose, but he is blemished with the weakness of his predecessor. Rhyme (for I will deal clearly) has somewhat of the usurper in him; but he is brave and generous, and his dominion pleasing."† To the objection that the difficulties of rhyme will lead to circumlocution, he answers in substance, that a good poet will know how to avoid them.

It is curious how long the superstition that Waller was the refiner of English verse has prevailed since Dryden first gave it vogue. He was a very poor poet and a purely mechanical versifier. He has lived mainly on the credit of a single couplet,

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\* Dedication of "Rival Ladies."

† Defence of the Essay. Dryden, in the happiness of his illustrative comparisons, is almost unmatched. Like himself, they occupy a middle ground between poetry and prose, — they are a cross between metaphor and simile.

“ The soul’s dark cottage, battered and decayed,  
 Lets in new light through chinks that Time hath made,”  
 in which the melody alone belongs to him, and the conceit,  
 such as it is, to Samuel Daniel, who said, long before, that the  
 body’s

“ walls, grown thin, permit the mind  
 To look out through and his frailty find.”

Waller has made worse nonsense of it in the transfusion. It might seem that Ben Jonson had a prophetic foreboding of him when he wrote: “ Others there are that have no composition at all, but a kind of tuning and rhyming fall, in what they write. It runs and slides and only makes a sound. Women’s poets they are called, as you have women’s tailors.

They write a verse as smooth, as soft, as cream,  
 In which there is no torrent, nor scarce stream.

You may sound these wits and find the depth of them with your middle-finger.”\* It seems to have been taken for granted by Waller, as afterwards by Dryden, that our elder poets bestowed no thought upon their verse. “ Waller was smooth,” but unhappily he was also flat, and his importation of the French theory of the couplet as a kind of thought-coop did nothing but mischief.† He never compassed even a smoothness approaching this description of a nightingale’s song by a third-rate poet of the earlier school, —

“ Trails her plain ditty in one long-spun note  
 Through the sleek passage of her open throat,  
 A clear, unwrinkled song,” —

one of whose beauties is its running over into the third verse. Those poets indeed

“ Felt music’s pulse in all her arteries ”;

\* Discoveries.

† What a wretched rhymers he could be we may see in his *alteration* of the “ Maid’s Tragedy ” of Beaumont and Fletcher : —

“ Not long since walking in the field,  
 My nurse and I, we there beheld  
 A goodly fruit ; which, tempting me,  
 I would have pluck’d ; but, trembling, she,  
 Whoever eat those berries, cried,  
 In less than half an hour died ! ”

What intolerable seesaw ! Not much of Byron’s “ fatal facility ” in these octosyllabics !

and Dryden himself found out, when he came to try it, that blank verse was not so easy a thing as he at first conceived it, nay, that it is the most difficult of all verse, and that it must make up in harmony, by variety of pause, and modulation for what it loses in the melody of rhyme. In what makes the chief merit of his later versification, he but rediscovered the secret of his predecessors in giving to rhymed pentameters something of the freedom of blank verse, and not mistaking metre for rhythm.

Voltaire, in his Commentary on Corneille, has sufficiently lamented the awkwardness of movement imposed upon the French dramatists by the gyves of rhyme. But he considers the necessity of overcoming this obstacle, on the whole, an advantage. Difficulty is his tenth and superior muse. How did Dryden, who says nearly the same thing, succeed in his attempt at the French manner? He fell into every one of its vices, without attaining much of what constitutes its excellence. From the nature of the language, all French poetry is purely artificial, and its high polish is all that keeps out decay. The length of their dramatic verse forces the French into much tautology, into bombast in its original meaning, the stuffing out a thought with words till it fills the line. The rigid system of their rhyme, which makes it much harder to manage than in English, has accustomed them to inaccuracies of thought which would shock them in prose. For example, in the "*Cinna*" of Corneille, as originally written, Emilie says to Augustus, —

" Ces flammes dans nos cœurs dès longtemps étoient nées,  
Et ce sont des secrets de plus de quatre années."

I say nothing of the second verse, which is purely prosaic surplusage exacted by the rhyme, nor of the jingling together of *ces, dès, étoient, nées, des, and secrets*, but I confess that *nées* does not seem to be the epithet that Corneille would have chosen for *flammes*, if he could have had his own way, and that flames would seem of all things the hardest to keep secret. But in revising, Corneille changed the first verse thus, —

" Ces flammes dans nos cœurs *sans votre ordre* étoient nées."

Can anything be more absurd than flames born to order? Yet Voltaire, on his guard against these rhyming pitfalls for the

sense, does not notice this in his minute comments on this play. Of extravagant metaphor, the result of this same making sound the file-leader of sense, a single example from "Heraclius" shall suffice:—

"La vapeur de mon sang ira grossir la foudre  
Que Dieu tient déjà prête à le reduire en poudre."

One cannot think of a Louis Quatorze Apollo except in a full-bottomed periwig, and the tragic style of their poets is always showing the disastrous influence of that portentous comet. It is the *style perruque* in another than the French meaning of the phrase, and the skill lay in dressing it majestically, so that, as Cibber says, "upon the head of a man of sense, *if it became him*, it could never fail of drawing to him a more partial regard and benevolence than could possibly be hoped for in an ill-made one." It did not become Dryden, and he left it off.\*

Like his own Zimri, Dryden was "all for" this or that fancy, till he took up with another. But even while he was writing on French models, his judgment could not be blinded to their defects. "Look upon the 'Cinna' and the 'Pompey,' they are not so properly to be called plays as long discourses of reason of State, and 'Polieucte' in matters of religion is as solemn as the long stops upon our organs; . . . their actors speak by the hour-glass like our parsons. . . . I deny not but this may suit well enough with the French, for as we, who are a more sullen people, come to be diverted at our plays, so they, who are of an airy and gay temper, come thither to make themselves more serious." † With what an air of innocent unconsciousness the sarcasm is driven home! Again, while he was still slaving at these bricks without straw, he says: "The present French poets are generally accused that, wheresoever they lay the scene, or in whatever age, the manners of their heroes are wholly French. Racine's *Bajazet* is bred at Constantinople, but his civilities are conveyed to him by some secret passage from Versailles into the Seraglio." It is curious that Voltaire, speaking of the *Bérénice* of Racine, praises a passage in it for precisely what Dryden condemns: "Il semble qu'on entende

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\* In more senses than one. His last and best portrait shows him in his own gray hair.

† Essay on Dramatic Poesy.

*Henriette* d'Angleterre elle-même parlant au marquis de *Vardes*. La politesse de la cour de *Louis XIV.*, l'agrément de la langue Française, la douceur de la versification la plus naturelle, le sentiment le plus tendre, tout se trouve dans ce peu de vers." After Dryden had broken away from the heroic style, he speaks out more plainly. In the Preface to his "All for Love," in reply to some cavils upon "little, and not essential decencies," the decision about which he refers to a master of ceremonies, he goes on to say: "The French poets, I confess, are strict observers of these punctilios; . . . in this nicety of manners does the excellency of French poetry consist. Their heroes are the most civil people breathing, but their good breeding seldom extends to a word of sense. All their wit is in their ceremony; they want the genius which animates our stage, and therefore 't is but necessary, when they cannot please, that they should take care not to offend. . . . They are so careful not to exasperate a critic that they never leave him any work, . . . for no part of a poem is worth our discommending where the whole is insipid, as when we have once tasted palled wine, we stay not to examine it glass by glass. But while they affect to shine in trifles, they are often careless in essentials. . . . For my part, I desire to be tried by the laws of my own country." This is said in heat, but it is plain enough that his mind was wholly changed. In his discourse on epic poetry he is as decided, but more temperate. He says that the French heroic verse "runs with more activity than strength.\* Their language is not strung with sinews like our English; it has the nimbleness of a greyhound, but not the bulk and body of a mastiff. Our men and our verses overbear them by their weight, and *pondere, non numero*, is the British motto. The French have set up purity for the standard of their language, and a masculine vigor is that of ours. Like their tongue is the genius of their poets, — light and trifling in comparison of the English."

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\* A French hendecasyllable verse runs exactly like our ballad measure: —

A cobbler there was and he lived in a stall, . . .

*La raison, pour marcher, n'a souvent qu'une voye.*

(Dryden's note.)

The verse is not a hendecasyllable. "Attended watchfully to her recitative (Mlle. Duchesnois), and find that, in nine lines out of ten, 'A cobbler there was,' &c., is the tune of the French heroics." — *Moore's Diary*, 24th April, 1821.

Dryden might have profited by an admirable saying of his own, that "they who would combat general authority with particular opinion must first establish themselves a reputation of understanding better than other men." He understood the defects much better than the beauties of the French theatre. Lessing was even more one-sided in his judgment upon it.\* Goethe, with his usual wisdom, studied it carefully without losing his temper, and tried to profit by its structural merits. Dryden, with his eyes wide open, copied its worst faults, especially its declamatory sentiment. He should have known that certain things can never be transplanted, and that among these is a style of poetry whose great excellence was that it was in perfect sympathy with the genius of the people among whom it came into being. But the truth is, that Dryden had no aptitude whatever for the stage, and in writing for it he was attempting to make a trade of his genius, — an arrangement from which the genius always withdraws in disgust. It was easier to make loose thinking and the bad writing which betrays it pass unobserved while the ear was occupied with the sonorous music of the rhyme to which they marched. Except in "All for Love," "the only play," he tells us, "which he wrote to please himself," † there is no trace of real passion in any of his tragedies. This, indeed, is inevitable, for there are no characters, but only personages, in any except that. That is, in many respects, a noble play, and there are few finer scenes, whether in the conception or the carrying out, than that between Antony and Ventidius in the first act.

As usual, Dryden's good sense was not blind to the extravagances of his dramatic style. In "Mac Flecknoe" he makes his own Maximin the type of childish rant,

" And little Maximins the gods defy " ;

but, as usual also, he could give a plausible reason for his own mistakes by means of that most fallacious of all fallacies which is true so far as it goes. In his Prologue to the "Royal Martyr" he says : —

" And he who servilely creeps after sense  
Is safe, but ne'er will reach an excellence.

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\* Diderot and Rousseau, however, thought their language unfit for poetry, and Voltaire seems to have half agreed with them.

† Parallel of Poetry and Painting.

But, when a tyrant for his theme he had,  
 He loosed the reins and let his muse run mad,  
 And, though he stumbles in a full career,  
 Yet rashness is a better fault than fear;

They then, who of each trip advantage take,  
 Find out those faults which they want wit to make."

And in the Preface to the same play he tells us: "I have not everywhere observed the equality of numbers in my verse, partly by reason of my haste, but more especially because I *would not have my sense a slave to syllables.*" Dryden, when he had not a bad case to argue, would have had small respect for the wit whose skill lay in the making of faults, and has himself, where his self-love was not engaged, admirably defined the boundary which divides boldness from rashness. He was thinking of himself, I fancy, when he makes Ventidius say of Antony, —

"He starts out wide  
 And bounds into a vice that bears him far  
 From his first course, and plunges him in ills;  
 But, when his danger makes him find his fault,  
 Quick to observe, and full of sharp remorse,  
 He censures eagerly his own misdeeds,  
 Judging himself with malice to himself,  
 And not forgiving what as man he did  
 Because his other parts are more than man."

But bad though they nearly all are as wholes, his plays contain passages which only the great masters have surpassed, and to the level of which no subsequent writer for the stage has ever risen. The necessity of rhyme often forced him to a platitude, as where he says, —

"My love was blind to your deluding art,  
 But blind men feel when stabbed so near the heart." \*

But even in rhyme he not seldom justifies his claim to the title of "glorious John." In the very play from which I have just quoted are these verses in his best manner: —

"No, like his better Fortune I'll appear,  
 With open arms, loose veil, and flowing hair,  
 Just flying forward from her rolling sphere."

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\* Conquest of Grenada, Second Part.



His comparisons, as I have said, are almost always happy. This, from the "Indian Emperor," is tenderly pathetic : —

"As callow birds,  
Whose mother's killed in seeking of the prey,  
Cry in their nest and think her long away,  
And, at each leaf that stirs, each blast of wind,  
Gape for the food which they must never find."

And this, of the anger with which the Maiden Queen, striving to hide her jealousy, betrays her love, is vigorous : —

"Her rage was love, and its tempestuous flame,  
Like lightning, showed the heaven from whence it came."

The following simile from the "Conquest of Granada" is as well expressed as it is apt in conception : —

"I scarcely understand my own intent ;  
But, silk-worm like, so long within have wrought,  
That I am lost in my own web of thought."

In the "Rival Ladies," Angelina, walking in the dark, describes her sensations naturally and strikingly : —

"No noise but what my footsteps make, and they  
Sound dreadfully and louder than by day :  
They double too, and every step I take  
Sounds thick, methinks, and more than one could make."

In all the rhymed plays\* there are many passages which one is rather inclined to like than sure he would be right in liking them. The following verses from "Aurengzebe" are of this sort : —

"My love was such it needed no return,  
Rich in itself, like elemental fire,  
Whose pureness does no aliment require."

This is Cowleyish, and *pureness* is surely the wrong word ; and yet it is better than mere commonplace. Perhaps what oftenest turns the balance in Dryden's favor, when we are weighing his claims as a poet, is his persistent capability of enthusiasm. To the last he kindles, and sometimes *almost* flashes out that supernatural light which is the supreme test of poetic genius. As he himself so finely and characteristically says in "Aurengzebe," there was no period in his life when it was not true of him that

"He felt the inspiring heat, the absent god return."

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\* In most, he mingles blank verse.

The verses which follow are full of him, and, with the exception of the single word *underwent*, are in his luckiest manner : —

“ One loose, one sally of a hero’s soul,  
Does all the military art control.  
While timorous wit goes round, or fords the shore,  
He shoots the gulf, and is already o’er,  
And, when the enthusiastic fit is spent,  
Looks back amazed at what he underwent.” \*

Pithy sentences and phrases always drop from Dryden’s pen as if unawares, whether in prose or verse. I string together a few at random : —

“ The greatest argument for love is love.”  
“ Few know the use of life before ’t is past.”  
“ Time gives himself and is not valued.”  
“ Death in itself is nothing ; but we fear  
To be we know not what, we know not where.”  
“ Love either finds equality or makes it ;  
Like death, he knows no difference in degrees.”  
“ That ’s empire, that which I can give away.”  
“ Yours is a soul irregularly great,  
Which, wanting temper, yet abounds in heat.”  
“ Forgiveness to the injured does belong,  
But they ne’er pardon who have done the wrong.”  
“ Poor women’s thoughts are all extempore.”  
“ The cause of love can never be assigned,  
’T is in no face, but in the lover’s mind.” †  
“ Heaven can forgive a crime to penitence,  
For Heaven can judge if penitence be true ;  
But man, who knows not hearts, should make examples.”  
“ Kings’ titles commonly begin by force,  
Which time wears off and mellows into right.”  
“ Fear ’s a large promiser ; who subject live  
To that base passion, know not what they give.”  
“ The secret pleasure of the generous act  
Is the great mind’s great bribe.”  
“ That bad thing, gold, buys all good things.”  
“ Why, love does all that ’s noble here below.”  
“ To prove religion true,  
If either wit or sufferings could suffice,  
All faiths afford the constant and the wise.”

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\* Conquest of Granada.

† This recalls some charming verses of Alfred de Musset : —

“ La muse est toujours belle,  
Même pour l’insensé, même pour l’impuissant,  
Car sa beauté pour nous, c’est notre amour pour elle.”

But Dryden, as he tells us himself,

“Grew weary of his long-loved mistress, Rhyme;  
 Passion’s too fierce to be in fetters bound,  
 And Nature flies him like enchanted ground.”

The finest things in his plays were written in blank verse, as vernacular to him as the alexandrine to the French. In this he vindicates his claim as a poet. His diction gets wings, and both his verse and his thought become capable of a reach which was denied them when set in the stocks of the couplet. The solid man becomes even airy in this new-found freedom: —

“‘How I loved,’ says Antony;  
 Witness ye days and nights, and all ye hours  
 That danced away with down upon your feet.”

And what image was ever more delicately exquisite, what movement more fadingly accordant with the sense, than in the last two verses of the following passage?

“I feel death rising higher still and higher,  
 Within my bosom; every breath I fetch  
 Shuts up my life within a shorter compass,  
 And, like the vanishing sound of bells, grows less  
 And less each pulse, till it be lost in air.”\*

Nor was he altogether without pathos, though it is rare with him. The following passage seems to me tenderly full of it: —

“Something like  
 That voice, methinks, I should have somewhere heard;  
 But floods of woe have hurried it far off  
 Beyond my ken of soul.”†

And this single verse from “Aurengzebe”: —

“Live still! oh live! live even to be unkind!”

with its passionate eagerness and sobbing repetition, is worth a ship-load of the long-drawn treacle of modern self-compassion.

Now and then, to be sure, we come upon something that makes us hesitate again whether, after all, Dryden was not grandiose rather than great, as in the two passages that next follow: —

“He looks secure of death, superior greatness,  
 Like Jove when he made Fate and said, Thou art  
 The slave of my creation.”‡

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\* Rival Ladies.

† Don Sebastian.

‡ Ibid.

“I’m pleased with my own work ; Jove was not more  
 With infant nature, when his spacious hand  
 Had rounded this huge ball of earth and seas,  
 To give it the first push and see it roll  
 Along the vast abyss.” \*

I should say that Dryden is more apt to dilate our fancy than our thought, as great poets have the gift of doing. But if he have not the potent alchemy that transmutes the lead of our commonplace associations into gold, as Shakespeare knows how to do so easily, yet his sense is always up to the sterling standard ; and though he has not added so much as some have done to the stock of bullion which others afterwards coin and put in circulation, there are few who have minted so many phrases that are still a part of our daily currency. The first line of the following passage has been worn pretty smooth, but the succeeding ones are less familiar :—

“Men are but children of a larger growth,  
 Our appetites as apt to change as theirs,  
 And full as craving too and full as vain ;  
 And yet the soul, shut up in her dark room,  
 Viewing so clear abroad, at home sees nothing ;  
 But, like a mole in earth, busy and blind,  
 Works all her folly up and casts it outward  
 In the world’s open view.” †

The image is mixed and even contradictory, but the thought obtains grace for it. I feel as if Shakespeare would have written *seeing* for *viewing*, thus gaining the strength of repetition in one verse and avoiding the sameness of it in the other. Dryden, I suspect, was not much given to correction, and indeed one of the great charms of his best writing is that everything seems struck off at a heat, as by a superior man in the best mood of his talk. Where he rises, he generally becomes fervent rather than imaginative ; his thought does not incorporate itself in metaphor, as in purely poetic minds, but repeats and reinforces itself in simile. Where he *is* imaginative, it is in that lower sense which the poverty of our language, for want of a better word, compels us to call *picturesque*, and even then he shows little of that finer instinct which suggests so much more than it tells, and works the more powerfully as it

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\* Cleomenes.

† All for Love.

taxes more the imagination of the reader. In Donne's "Relic" there is an example of what I mean. He fancies some one breaking up his grave and spying

"A bracelet of bright hair about the bone,"—

a verse that still shines there in the darkness of the tomb, after two centuries, like one of those inextinguishable lamps whose secret is lost.\* Yet Dryden sometimes showed a sense of this magic of a mysterious hint, as in the "Spanish Friar":—

"No, I confess, you bade me not in words;  
The dial spoke not, but it made shrewd signs,  
And pointed full upon the stroke of murder."

This is perhaps a solitary example. Nor is he always so possessed by the image in his mind as unconsciously to choose even the picturesquely imaginative word. He has done so, however, in this passage from "Marriage à la Mode":—

"You ne'er must hope again to see your princess,  
Except as prisoners view fair walks and streets,  
And careless passengers going by their grates."

But, after all, he is best upon a level, table-land, it is true, and a very high level, but still somewhere between the higher peaks of inspiration and the plain of every-day life. In those passages where he moralizes he is always good, setting some obvious truth in a new light by vigorous phrase and happy illustration. Take this (from "Œdipus") as a proof of it:—

"The gods are just,  
But how can finite measure infinite?  
Reason! alas, it does not know itself!  
Yet man, vain man, would with his short-lined plummet  
Fathom the vast abyss of heavenly justice.  
Whatever is, is in its causes just,  
Since all things are by fate. But purblind man  
Sees but a part o' th' chain, the nearest links,  
His eyes not carrying to that equal beam  
That poises all above."

From the same play I pick an illustration of that ripened sweetness of thought and language which marks the natural

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\* Dryden, with his wonted perspicacity, calls Donne "the greatest wit, though not the best poet, of our nation." (Dedication of Eleonora.) Even as a poet Donne

"Had in him those brave translunary things  
That our first poets had."

To open vistas for the imagination through the blind wall of the senses, as he could sometimes do, is the supreme function of poetry.

vein of Dryden. One cannot help applying the passage to the late Mr. Quincy : —

“ Of no distemper, of no blast he died,  
But fell like autumn fruit that mellowed long,  
E'en wondered at because he dropt no sooner ;  
Fate seemed to wind him up for fourscore years ;  
Yet freshly ran he on ten winters more,  
Till, like a clock worn out with eating Time,  
The wheels of weary life at last stood still.”\*

Here is another of the same kind from “ All for Love ” : —

“ Gone so soon !  
Is Death no more ? He used him carelessly,  
With a familiar kindness ; ere he knocked,  
Ran to the door and took him in his arms,  
As who should say, You're welcome at all hours,  
A friend need give no warning.”

With one more extract from the same play, which is in every way his best, for he had, when he wrote it, been feeding on the bee-bread of Shakespeare, I shall conclude. Antony says : —

“ For I am now so sunk from what I was,  
Thou find'st me at my lowest water-mark.  
The rivers that ran in and raised my fortunes  
Are all dried up, or take another course :  
What I have left is from my native spring ;  
I've a heart still that swells in scorn of Fate,  
And lifts me to my banks.”

This is certainly, from beginning to end, in what used to be called the *grand* style at once noble and natural. I have not undertaken to analyze any one of the plays, for (except in “ All for Love ”) it would have been only to expose their weakness. Dryden had *no* constructive faculty ; and in every one of his longer poems that required a plot, the plot is bad, always more or less inconsistent with itself, and rather hitched-on to the subject than combining with it. It is fair to say, however, before leaving this part of Dryden's literary work, that Horne Tooke thought “ Don Sebastian ” “ the best play extant.” † Gray admired the plays of Dryden, “ not as dramatic compositions, but as poetry.” ‡ Of their rant, their fustian, their bom-

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\* My own judgment is my sole warrant for attributing these extracts from *Œdipus* to Dryden rather than Lee.

† Recollections of Rogers, p. 165.

‡ Nicholls's Reminiscences of Gray. Pickering's edition of Gray's Works, Vol. V. p. 35.

bast, their bad English, of their innumerable sins against Dryden's own better conscience both as poet and critic, I shall excuse myself from giving any instances.\* I like what is good in Dryden so much, and it is so good, that I think Gray was justified in always losing his temper when he heard "his faults criticised." †

It is as a satirist and pleader in verse that Dryden is best known, and as both he is in some respects unrivalled. His satire is not so sly as Chaucer's, but it is distinguished by the same good-nature. There is no malice in it. I shall not enter into his literary quarrels further than to say that he seems to me, on the whole, to have been forbearing, which is the more striking as he tells us repeatedly that he was naturally vindictive. It was he who called revenge "the darling attribute of heaven." "I complain not of their lampoons and libels, though I have been the public mark for many years. I am vindictive enough to have repelled force by force, if I could imagine that any of them had ever reached me." It was this feeling of easy superiority, I suspect, that made him the mark for so much jealous vituperation. Scott is wrong in attributing his onslaught upon Settle to jealousy because one of the latter's plays had been performed at Court, — an honor never paid to any of Dryden's. ‡ I have found nothing like a trace of jealousy in that large and benignant nature. In his vindication of the "Duke of Guise," he says, with honest confidence in himself: "Nay, I durst

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\* Let one suffice for all. In the "Royal Martyr," Porphyrius, awaiting his execution, says to Maximin, who had wished him for a son-in-law: —

"Where'er thou stand'st, I'll level at that place  
My gushing blood, and spout it at thy face;  
Thus not by marriage we our blood will join;  
Nay, more, my arms shall throw my head at thine."

"It is no shame," says Dryden himself, "to be a poet, though it is to be a bad one."

† Gray, *ubi supra*, p. 38.

‡ Scott had never seen Pepys's Diary when he wrote this, or he would have left it unwritten: "Fell to discourse of the last night's work at Court, where the ladies and Duke of Monmouth acted the 'Indian Emperor,' wherein they told me these things most remarkable, that not any woman but the Duchess of Monmouth and Mrs. Cornwallis did anything but like fools and stocks, but that these two did do most extraordinary well; that not any man did anything well but Captain O'Bryan, who spoke and did well, but above all things did dance most incomparably." — 14th January, 1668.

almost refer myself to some of the angry poets on the other side, whether I have not rather countenanced and assisted their beginnings than hindered them from rising." He seems to have been really as indifferent to the attacks on himself as Pope pretended to be. In the same vindication he says of the "Rehearsal," the only one of them that had any wit in it, and it has a great deal: "Much less am I concerned at the noble name of Bayes; that's a brat so like his own father that he cannot be mistaken for any other body. They might as reasonably have called Tom Sternhold Virgil, and the resemblance would have held as well." In his *Essay on Satire* he says: "And yet we know that in Christian charity all offences are to be forgiven as we expect the like pardon for those we daily commit against Almighty God. And this consideration has often made me tremble when I was saying our Lord's Prayer; for the plain condition of the forgiveness which we beg is the pardoning of others the offences which they have done to us; for which reason I have many times avoided the commission of that fault, even when I have been notoriously provoked."\* And in another passage he says, with his usual wisdom: "Good sense and good-nature are never separated, though the ignorant world has thought otherwise. Good-nature, by which I mean beneficence and candor, is the product of right reason, which of necessity will give allowance to the failings of others, by considering that there is nothing perfect in mankind." In the same *Essay* he gives his own receipt for satire: "How easy it is to call rogue and villain, and that wittily! but how hard to make a man appear a fool, a blockhead, or a knave, without using any of those opprobrious terms! . . . This is the mystery of that noble trade. . . . Neither is it true that this fineness of raillery is offensive: a witty man is tickled while he is hurt in this manner, and a fool feels it not. . . . There is a vast difference between the slovenly butchering of a man and the fineness of a stroke that separates the head from the body, and leaves it standing in its place. A man may be capable, as Jack Ketch's wife said of his servant, of a plain piece of work, of a bare hanging; but to make a malefactor die sweetly was only be-

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\* See also that noble passage in the "*Hind and Panther*" (1573-1591), where this is put into verse. Dryden always thought in prose.



longing to her husband. I wish I could apply it to myself, if the reader would be kind enough to think it belongs to me. The character of Zimri in my 'Absalom' is, in my opinion, worth the whole poem. It is not bloody, but it is ridiculous enough, and he for whom it was intended was too witty to resent it as an injury. . . . I avoided the mention of great crimes, and applied myself to the representing of blind sides and little extravagances, to which, the wittier a man is, he is generally the more obnoxious."

Dryden thought his genius led him that way. In his elegy on the satirist Oldham, whom Hallam, without reading him, I suspect, ranks next to Dryden,\* he says: —

"For sure our souls were near allied, and thine  
Cast in the same poetic mould with mine;  
One common note in either lyre did strike,  
And knaves and fools we both abhorred alike."

His practice is not always so delicate as his theory; but if he was sometimes rough, he never took a base advantage. He knocks his antagonist down, and there an end. Pope seems to have nursed his grudge, and then, watching his chance, to have squirted vitriol from behind a corner, rather glad than otherwise if it fell on the women of those he hated or envied. And if Dryden is never dastardly, as Pope often was, so also he never wrote anything so maliciously depreciatory as Pope's unprovoked attack on Addison. Dryden's satire is often coarse, but where it is coarsest, it is commonly in defence of himself against attacks that were themselves brutal. Then, to be sure, he snatches the first ready cudgel, as in Shadwell's case, though even then there is something of the good-humor of conscious strength. Pope's provocation was too often the mere opportunity to say a biting thing, where he could do it safely. If his victim showed fight, he tried to smooth things over, as with Dennis. Dryden could forget that he had ever had a quarrel, but he never slunk away from any, least of all from one provoked by himself.† Pope's satire is too much occupied with the

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\* Probably on the authority of this very epitaph, as if epitaphs were to be believed even under oath! A great many authors live because we read nothing but their tombstones. Oldham was, to borrow one of Dryden's phrases, "a bad or, which is worse, an indifferent poet."

† "He was of a nature exceedingly humane and compassionate, easily forgiving

externals of manners, habits, personal defects, and peculiarities. Dryden goes right to the rooted character of the man, to the weaknesses of his nature, as where he says of Burnet : —

“ Prompt to assail, and careless of defence,  
Invulnerable in his impudence,  
He dares the world, and, eager of a name,  
He thrusts about and *justles into fame*.  
So fond of loud report that, not to miss  
Of being known (his last and utmost bliss),  
*He rather would be known for what he is.*”

It would be hard to find in Pope such compression of meaning as in the first, or such penetrative sarcasm as in the second of the passages I have underscored. Dryden's satire is still quoted for its comprehensiveness of application, Pope's rather for the elegance of its finish and the point of its phrase than for any deeper qualities.\* I do not remember that Dryden ever makes poverty a reproach.† He was above it, alike by generosity of birth and mind. Pope is always the *parvenu*, always giving himself the airs of a fine gentleman, and, like Horace Walpole and Byron, affecting superiority to professional literature. Dryden, like Lessing, was a hack-writer, and was proud, as an honest man has a right to be, of being able to get his bread by his brains. He lived in Grub Street all his life, and never dreamed that where a man of genius lived was not the best quarter of the town. “Tell his Majesty,” said sturdy old Jonson, “that his soul lives in an alley.”

Dryden's prefaces are a mine of good writing and judicious criticism. His *obiter dicta* have often the penetration, and

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injuries, and capable of a prompt and sincere reconciliation with them that had offended him.” — Congreve.

\* Coleridge says excellently: “You will find this a good gauge or criterion of genius, — whether it progresses and evolves, or only spins upon itself. Take Dryden's Achitophel and Zimri; every line adds to or modifies the character, which is, as it were, a-building up to the very last verse; whereas in Pope's Timon, &c., the first two or three couplets contain all the pith of the character, and the twenty or thirty lines that follow are so much evidence or proof of overt acts of jealousy, or pride, or whatever it may be that is satirized.” (Table-Talk, 192.) Some of Dryden's best satirical *hits* are let fall by seeming accident in his prose, as where he says of his Protestant assailants, “Most of them love all whores but her of Babylon.” They had first attacked him on the score of his private morals.

† That he taxes Shadwell with it is only a seeming exception, as any careful reader will see.

always more than the equity, of Voltaire's, for Dryden never loses temper, and never altogether qualifies his judgment by his self-love. "He was a more universal writer than Voltaire," said Horne Tooke, and perhaps it is true that he had a broader view, though his learning was neither so extensive nor so accurate. My space will not afford many extracts, but I cannot forbear one or two. He says of Chaucer, that "he is a perpetual fountain of good sense,"\* and likes him better than Ovid,—a bold confession in that day. He prefers the pastorals of Theocritus to those of Virgil. "Virgil's shepherds are too well read in the philosophy of Epicurus and of Plato"; "there is a kind of rusticity in all those pompous verses, somewhat of a holiday shepherd strutting in his country buskins";† "Theocritus is softer than Ovid, he touches the passions more delicately, and performs all this out of his own fund, without diving into the arts and sciences for a supply. Even his Doric dialect has an incomparable sweetness in his clownishness, like a fair shepherdess, in her country russet, talking in a Yorkshire tone."‡ Comparing Virgil's verse with that of some other poets, he says, that his "numbers are perpetually varied to increase the delight of the reader, so that the same sounds are never repeated twice together. On the contrary, Ovid and Claudian, though they write in styles different from each other, yet have each of them but one sort of music in their verses. All the versification and little variety of Claudian is included within the compass of four or five lines, and then he begins again in the same tenor, perpetually closing his sense at the end of a verse, and that verse commonly which they call golden, or two substantives and two adjectives with a verb betwixt them to keep the peace. Ovid, with all his sweetness, has as little variety of numbers and sound as he; he is always, as it were, upon the hand-gallop, and his verse runs upon carpet-ground."§ What a dreary half-century would have been saved to English poetry, could Pope have laid these sentences to heart! Upon translation, no one has written so much and so well as Dryden in his various prefaces. Whatever has been said since is either expansion or variation of what

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\* Preface to Fables.

† Dedication of the Georgics.

‡ Preface to Second Miscellany.

§ Ibid.

he had said before. His general theory may be stated as an aim at something between the literalness of metaphrase and the looseness of paraphrase. "Where I have enlarged," he says, "I desire the false critics would not always think that those thoughts are wholly mine, but either *they are secretly in the poet*, or may be fairly deduced from him." Coleridge, with his usual cleverness of *assimilation*, has condensed him in a letter to Wordsworth: "There is no medium between a prose version and one on the avowed principle of *compensation* in the widest sense, i. e. manner, genius, total effect." \*

I have selected these passages, not because they are the best, but because they have a near application to Dryden himself. His own characterization of Chaucer (though too narrow for the greatest but one of English poets) is the best that could be given of himself: "He is a perpetual fountain of good sense." And the other passages show him a close and open-minded student of the art he professed. Has his influence on our literature, but especially on our poetry, been on the whole for good or evil? If he could have been read with the liberal understanding which he brought to the works of others, I should answer at once that it had been beneficial. But his translations and paraphrases, in some ways the best things he did, were done, like his plays, under contract to deliver a certain number of verses for a specified sum. The versification, of which he had learned the art by long practice, is excellent, but his haste has led him to fill out the measure of lines with phrases that add only to dilute, and thus the clearest, the most direct, the most manly versifier of his time became, without meaning it, the source (*fons et origo malorum*) of that poetic diction from which our poetry has not even yet recovered. I do not like to say it, but he has sometimes smothered the childlike simplicity of Chaucer under feather-beds of verbiage. What this kind of thing came to in the next century, when everybody ceremoniously took a bushel-basket to bring a wren's egg to market in, is only too sadly familiar. Dryden, as usual, had a good reason to urge for what he did: "I will not excuse, but justify myself for one pretended crime for which I am liable to be charged by false critics, not only in this trans-

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\* Memoirs of Wordsworth, Vol. II. p. 74 (American edition).

lation, but in many of my original poems, — that I Latinize too much. It is true that when I find an English word significant and sounding, I neither borrow from the Latin or any other language; but when I want at home I must seek abroad. If sounding words are not of our growth and manufacture, who shall hinder me to import them from a foreign country? I carry not out the treasure of the nation which is never to return; but what I bring from Italy I spend in England: here it remains, and here it circulates; for if the coin be good, it will pass from one hand to another. I trade both with the living and the dead for the enrichment of our native language. We have enough in England to supply our necessity; but if we will have things of magnificence and splendor, we must get them by commerce. . . . Therefore, if I find a word in a classic author, I propose it to be naturalized by using it myself, and if the public approve of it the bill passes. But every man cannot distinguish betwixt pedantry and poetry; every man, therefore, is not fit to innovate.”\* This is admirably said, and with Dryden’s accustomed penetration to the root of the matter. The Latin has given us most of our canorous words, only they must not be confounded with merely sonorous ones, still less with phrases that, instead of supplementing the sense, encumber it. It was of Latinizing in this sense that Dryden was guilty. Instead of stabbing, he “with steel invades the life.” The consequence was that by and by we have Dr. Johnson’s poet, Savage, telling us, —

“In front, a parlor meets my entering view,  
Opposed a room to sweet refection due”;

Dr. Blacklock making a forlorn maiden say of her “dear,” who is out late, —

“Or by some apoplectic fit deprest  
Perhaps, alas! he seeks eternal rest”;

and Mr. Bruce, in a Danish war-song, calling on the vikings to “assume their oars.”

Dryden has also been blamed for his gallicisms.† He tried

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\* “If the *public* approve.” “On ne pent pas admettre dans le développement des langues aucune révolution artificielle et sciemment exécutée; il n’y a pour elles ni conciles, ni assemblées délibérantes; on ne les réforme pas comme une constitution vicieuse.” — Renan, *De l’Origine du Langage*, p. 95.

† This is an old complaint. Puttenham sighs over such innovation in Eliza-

some, it is true, but they have not been accepted. I do not think he added a single word to the language, unless, as I suspect, he first used *magnetism* in its present sense of moral attraction. What he did in his best writing was to use the English as if it were a spoken, and not merely an inkhorn language; as if it were his own to do what he pleased with it, as if it need not be ashamed of itself.\* In this respect, his service to our prose was greater than any other man has ever rendered. He says he formed his style upon Tillotson's (Bossuet, on the other hand, formed *his* upon Corneille's); but I rather think he got it at Will's, for its great charm is that it has the various freedom of talk.† In verse, he had a pomp which, excellent in itself, became pompousness in his imitators. But he had nothing of Milton's ear for various rhythm and interwoven harmony. He knew how to give new modulation, sweetness, and force to the pentameter; but in what used to be called pindarics, I am heretic enough to think he generally failed. His so much praised "Alexander's Feast" (in parts of it, at least) has no excuse for its slovenly metre and awkward expression, but that it was written for music. He himself tells us, in the epistle dedicatory to "King Arthur," "that the numbers of poetry and vocal music are sometimes so contrary, that in many places I have been obliged to cramp my verses and make them rugged to the reader that they may be harmonious to the hearer." His renowned ode suffered from this constraint, but this is no apology for the vulgarity of conception in too many passages.

Dryden was short of body, inclined to stoutness, and florid of complexion. He is said to have had "a sleepy eye," but

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beth's time, and Carew in James's. A language grows, and is not made. Almost all the new-fangled words with which Jonson taxes Marston in his "Poetaster" are now current.

\* Like most idiomatic, as distinguished from correct writers, he knew very little about the language historically or critically. His prose and poetry swarm with locutions that would have made Lindley Murray's hair stand on end. *How* little he knew is plain from his criticising in Ben Jonson the use of *ones* in the plural, of "Though Heaven should speak with all *his* wrath," and *be* "as false English for *are*, though the rhyme hides it." Yet all are good English, and I have found them all in Dryden's own writing! Of his sins against idiom I have a longer list than I have room for. And yet he is one of our highest authorities for *real* English.

† To see what he rescued us from in pedantry on the one hand, and vulgarity on the other, read Feltham and Tom Brown — if you can.

was handsome and of a manly carriage. He still reigns in literary tradition, as when at Will's his elbow-chair had the best place by the fire in winter, or on the balcony in summer, and when a pinch from his snuff-box made a young author blush with pleasure as would now-a-days a favorable notice in the "Saturday Review." What gave and secures for him this singular eminence? To put it in a single word, I think that his qualities and faculties were in that rare combination which makes character. This gave *flavor* to whatever he wrote,—a very rare quality.

Was he, then, a great poet? Hardly, in the narrowest definition. But he was a strong thinker who sometimes carried common sense to a height where it catches the light of a diviner air, and warmed reason till it had wellnigh the illuminating property of intuition. Certainly he is not, like Spenser, the poets' poet, but other men have also their rights. Even the Philistine is a man and a brother, and is entirely right so far as he sees. To demand more of him is to be unreasonable. And he sees, among other things, that a man who undertakes to write should first have a meaning perfectly defined to himself, and then should be able to set it forth clearly in the best words. This is precisely Dryden's praise, and amid the rickety sentiment looming big through misty phrase which marks so much of modern literature, to read him is as bracing as a northwest wind. He blows the mind clear. In ripeness of mind and bluff heartiness of expression, he takes rank with the best. His phrase is always a short-cut to his sense, for his estate was too spacious for him to need that trick of winding the path of his thought about, and planting it out with clumps of epithet, by which the landscape-gardeners of literature give to a paltry half-acre the air of a park. In poetry, to be next-best is, in one sense, to be nothing; and yet to be among the first in any kind of writing, as Dryden certainly was, is to be one of a very small company. He had, beyond most, the gift of the right word. And if he does not, like one or two of the greater masters of song, stir our sympathies by that indefinable aroma so magical in arousing the subtle associations of the soul, he has this in common with the few great writers, that the winged seeds of his thought imbed themselves in the memory and germinate there.

Perhaps no man has summed him up so well as John Dennis, one of Pope's typical dunces, a dull man outside of his own sphere, as men are apt to be, but who had some sound notions as a critic, and thus became the object of Pope's fear and therefore of his resentment. Dennis speaks of him as his "departed friend, whom I infinitely esteemed when living for the solidity of his thought, for the spring and the warmth and the beautiful turn of it; for the power and variety and fulness of his harmony; for the purity, the perspicuity, the energy of his expression; and, whenever these great qualities are required, for the pomp and solemnity and majesty of his style."\*

J. R. LOWELL.

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ART. X. — COMMERCIAL IMMORALITY AND POLITICAL CORRUPTION.

ARE not all the great communities of the Western World growing more corrupt as they grow in wealth? In other words, Is not the power of money over human conduct increasing with alarming rapidity? If it is, what are the chances of change, or reformation? Where are we to look for the means of arresting this tendency, and purifying the commercial and political atmosphere? These are questions which many thoughtful men are asking themselves, in England, America, and France, but much more earnestly and constantly in England and America than in France, because the commercial spirit in the former countries is much stronger, and the power of money much greater, than it is in the latter.

It is not necessary to dwell on the phenomena which suggest these inquiries. Everybody is familiar with them. Foremost amongst them is the prevailing love of luxury. The luxury of this age, too, differs from that of all preceding ages, in that it is not, as it used to be, a thing appropriated to one class in society, and which other classes can only enjoy as a spectacle. The idea that certain modes of liv-

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\* Dennis in a letter to Tonson, 1715.